



B^o 20. 1. 118



AN ESSAY
ON THE
GENIUS OF SHAKESPEARE,
&c.

LONDON:

INOTSON AND PALMER, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

AN ESSAY
ON THE
Genius of Shakespeare,

WITH CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHARACTERS OF
ROMEO, HAMLET, JULIET, AND OPHELIA;

TOGETHER WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON
THE WRITINGS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,
A LETTER TO LORD —,

CONTAINING

A CRITIQUE

ON

TASTE, JUDGMENT, AND RHETORICAL EXPRESSION,

AND REMARKS ON

THE LEADING ACTORS OF THE DAY.

Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child.—MILTON.

BY

HENRY MERCER GRAVES,

AUTHOR OF CATILINE, A TRAGEDY;
SKETCHES OF HIGH LIFE AND OF THE TENTH;
THE AMATORY ODES OF HORACE TRANSLATED;
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENCE,
&c. &c.

LONDON:

JAMES BIGG, 53, PARLIAMENT STREET.
1826.



LONDON:
ROBSON AND PALMER, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

TO THE
RIGHT HON. GEORGE CANNING.

§c. §c.

SIR,

I DO MYSELF THE HONOUR
OF
PRESENTING TO YOU THE FOLLOWING WORK.

AS YOUR NAME CARRIES ITS OWN EULOGY WITH IT,
YOUR TALENTS REQUIRE NO FLATTERY FROM ME,
IN A MORE PROLIX DEDICATION,

I AM, SIR,

YOUR VERY OBEDIENT

AND VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

HENRY M. GRAVES.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN submitting the following Essay to the reader, I shall be permitted to mention to him, that I have purposely avoided reading any critique, paper, essay, or remarks on either the genius or the characters of our celebrated Bard. I mention this, more for the professed critic than for the general reader, for the purpose of saying that *if* plagiarism (than which I know nothing more unpardonable) is to be discovered in the work, I trust it will be attributed to accident, and *not* wilfulness.

The Essay which follows, was one of four others, for which the author received a prize; (unjustly he owns when he recollects the cleverness of the other papers;) and the Letter which is

annexed, was intended by me to be made more polished and finished for the public eye; but I found that in doing so, I but added study instead of ornament; and as the former is *totally* irrelevant in the *epistolary* style, I shall allow it to be perused *exactly* as it was originally written, and have only to blame myself, if the critic should treat it harshly.

AN ESSAY

ON THE

GENIUS OF SHAKESPEARE,

&c. &c.

IN writing the following essay on the genius of our immortal bard, I dare say I shall meet some readers who will tell me that I have been pervaded too much with those kind of favourable ideas which look on the works of *such* a poet as *faultless*. Minds uninfluenced by the melody of poetry, (melody too such as *his*) and uncaptivated by the charms which his scenes present, will necessarily agree in thinking, that my admiration is somewhat too warm, and my eulogy too high. To such readers, I own I should feel but little pleasure in addressing myself. I blame them not, however. Business, and a thousand other avocations must, necessarily, prevent their having

either time or inclination to look into his works, or admire his beauties. Interest in *them* they cannot take—then why should they in his *praise*; however, if apology is necessary to severer critics or duller minds, I must only say, that somewhat of warmth and eulogy must be allowed when writing on such a theme as the praise of Shakespeare.

I am blamed, perhaps, by many as one who is led away, by too delightedly listening to the tones of a harp, struck by such a mighty master as Shakespeare. The melody has been flung too harmoniously on my ear, and the breathings of its chords has been thrown too hurriedly on a mind, perhaps too sensible to the beauty which rings from it, and the sweetness which pervades it. To this charge I own. Perhaps I *am* too fond both of him and the temple where he is worshipped. Sincerity though I claim. His worshipper is not a cold one; and if I am lavish in my praises of him, I feel *convinced* they are deserved.

I address myself then to those who can take an *interest* in subjects such as the present. If any should find fault with it, who do not exactly belong to this class, their censure, I should imagine, would be *unfair*. Like the laws of my country, I

claim a right to be tried by my *peers*, and though I have no doubt that many will be willing enough to blame me, I yet shall not much heed their opinion, unless it has *judgment* to give it weight. To *legitimate* critics I commit myself. I cannot say that I will claim much merit for writing on the genius of Shakespeare. It is a subject fertile in itself, and abundant and sufficient for him who would draw materials from it. Many have spoken of it, but it yet remains a fund rich and inexhausted, from which the sons of genius can yet draw themes to hand down to latest ages. Though I readily admit that the subject has been most ably handled before, yet I may, in some measure, screen myself from the charge of temerity, in writing on what such able critics have gone through, by remarking, that the perusal of the plays of this master have been a source of the most infinite delight to me. Thus would I endeavour to do away the idea that I am wrong in speaking on a subject, which has been so often and so critically passed over. It is yet though inexhausted. It is a path and a region of sweets. Flowers spring around you at every turn, scattered by that hand, whose touch has thrilled on the high harp of poetry, and whose fingers leave on them the sweetness which they for ever will

breathe of. The laurel here blooms fresh and fair—blooms brightest too; for Shakespeare hallows its soil. To pluck a branch I will dare. My merit, I own, may not be equivalent to the boldness of the attempt, but the theme of Shakespeare's praise is fertile in itself; it can enlarge and invigorate the most torpid mind, and even on the leaden gravity of dulness, can bind the airy wing of fancy.

Above all those poets who have, in any age or nation shed a lustre on mankind, Shakespeare stands unrivalled *in the power of painting with the energy and fidelity of truth and nature*; his pictures live before you; they strike at once on the heart, enter into all its feelings, and enchain all its attentions. Let the eye throw but a cursory glance on them, 'tis irresistibly impelled to fix its most earnest gaze. While engaged in his scenes, you think no longer of *him* who writes, but of *those* who act and speak; you weep for their distresses, and rejoice at their happiness; you follow them through all the variety of their fortunes, and sympathize in all their feelings; you watch over them with anxious solicitude for their welfare when good, and burn against them with indignation and hatred when bad. Whence does this proceed? Why is it that his *representations*

thus seem *realities*, and that they find their way at once to the heart, with such immediate and resistless force? Whence is it, that while the works of other poets are at once overwhelmed beneath the ocean of time, or at best feebly resist the gulphs of oblivion, the blasts of prejudice, or the rocks of criticism; that those of Shakespeare still bear up triumphant and unimpaired? 'Tis because he wrote from the inspiration of *nature herself*; 'tis because she filled his whole soul, and made it her temple to dwell in. She guided every idea, warmed and perfected every description, and fired every effusion and passion. She made him acquainted with all her wide extended kingdom, laid before him all its various views, led him through every path, and to every hidden recess; displayed to him the gardens of her roses and flowers, and made him copy the loveliest scenes of hill and dale, of beauteous skies, of gloomy forests, and stupendous rocks, and lay them before the charmed and ravished eye of man! She showed to him the ample and irregular province of the human heart; gave him to trace with penetrative sagacity through all its mazy windings, and look through its most secret ways; and as his eye glowed from the view, she commanded him to stamp each living image that he drew, with the

indelible impression of truth, and the vivid colouring of nature.)

Where meet we with the burst of woe and the wail of sadness? Where, with the low voice of feeling, and the tremulous tone of despondency? Where shall we look for the flowing melody that ravishes the ear, and the dulcet songs that thrill on the soul? Where for the language that reaches the heart, and hurries it away with the deep impulse of wonder and ravishment? In Shakespeare.—in all-creative Shakespeare! unrivalled and alone he stands single and pre-eminent as the only *master* who has struck the chords of *the harp of nature*—others are but learners—scholars. *He* the proud and high spirit that has played on its tones with the might and the melody of an omnipotence!

Where shall we look for his rival? I in vain look around me to try and place some mighty spirit by his side, but I see him not. There is a *peculiar* and a flowing sweetness in the rhyme of Shakespeare, that *never* yet has been attained. It runs from his harp, as if he were so conscious of its pleasing, that he heeded not the tones which swept beneath his fingers. Carefulness is laid by. Unheeded by him, harmony, softness, plaintiveness,

and beauty, and eloquence, and melody, and brightness flow and flash from the strings that are dashed over with the hurried and yet beautiful minstrelsy of creative diversity. Extremes here meet. Terror and touchingness—simplicity and sublimity melt and mingle into such eloquent *discordia concors*, that the soul is hurried away by the divineness of the tones, and gives itself up to his guidance as if overpowered and entranced. What other mortal had this power but Shakespeare? *Why* should he not have had it, when he was Nature's own child—her favourite son—her beloved offspring. Step-sons are her other children. They have been *received* into her family; but they have not been *nursed* by her. Shakespeare was under her own eye—her guidance—her protection. She gave him power unlimited, and sway uncontrolled—told him to range the earth and sweep the sea—bid him look into her most hidden recesses and open her secret springs—empowered him to go over the wide globe and to trace the pathless plains of the scenes of other worlds—then soar to her heaven and stay throned there, high and immortal!

If we look carefully into other writers, we shall find that they paint their characters, actuated by peculiar modes and customs, accidental fashions

and local, personal, and professional opinions and prejudices, unknown to mankind in general, and practised perhaps not by a nation or sect, but by a single individual. Such character therefore can only interest that inconsiderable portion, with whom they are connected by a similarity in customs, manners, and sentiments. But Shakespeare with a powerful eye looked abroad on the *whole* race of man. The grand outlines of human nature are ever the same, and however the light, shades, colouring, and costume may be influenced by those contingent changes, which affect time and place; yet the principal figures still retain their original form, force, and size. The piercing optics of our mighty poet saw this, and with a well skilled hand he drew those *universal* habits, feelings, passions, and desires, which are born with *all* men, and interwoven with their existence. *His* characters are no creatures of a day—no ephemeral abortions that only live to die—no spurious progeny raised by the false sunshine of a transient fashion, and fading into the darkness of oblivion when that fashion yields to another as fleeting as itself:—and thus it is that those of all nations and all ages, however distinguished by particular modes and prejudices, and whatever else forms a difference in the human character—

will find in his works pleasure and instruction—will feel interested in his scenes and characters, for the hearts of all will be touched, where each owns a relation and connection.

I shall now glance at three or four characters, which have indeed been sketched by a true master's hand; and there are few portraits by this first of painters which have been embodied in such glowing, vivid, and *just* colouring, as those to which I allude.

Two of them have been imitated a thousand and a thousand times, but never have succeeded; the second (for it seems unapproachable) has never been imitated. I now speak of the first.

The character of Romeo is that of the most perfectly drawn lover I ever read. All succeeding impressions seem to have been taken from this, but have never come up to it in pathos, feeling, and overwhelming depth of passion. In this last attribute, the character of "The Giaour," from the creative and powerful hand of Byron, comes nearest to it of any I have read; but his stormy passions want the other two redeeming qualities to give it that interest and suavity, which wins and twines round the female heart so impercepti-

bly—so powerfully. The language which Shakespeare uses when he makes these interesting lovers converse, is some of the very sweetest that ever flowed from his pen. I know nothing (in that line) so exquisitely sweet—so passingly tender, as the garden scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Passion, tenderness, feeling, omnipotent love breathe in every line, and run rich and riotous through every expression. Mark his discrimination. His scene is a garden of blushing roses and balmy flowers. It is night—the night that is in Italy—soft, silent, calm, and lonely. The moon is up, and his interesting and most lovely heroine is flung on a couch watching her course among her attending stars, but her thoughts far away on “the God of her Idolatry.” How *natural* is her sigh, and the short but expressive

“Ah me!”

The reader must look into this, or it will appear common-place to him. Had Shakespeare put a long and elaborate speech into her mouth for her *first* expressions there is no ear of taste that would not have deprecated the incorrectness of it. But *that* word speaks her heart, and wherever the heart speaks, either on the stage or in real life, it *never*

is incorrect. How appropriate too is her lover's appeal to her, when he hears that first sound of her well known voice. It is brilliant and vivid.

She speaks! she speaks!

Oh speak again bright angel, for thou art
As glorious to this sight, being o'er my head
As is a winged messenger from heaven
To the upturn'd wond'ring eyes of mortals
When he bestrides the lazy pacing clouds,
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

If the reader looks closely into this, he will perceive a *little* of bombast in it. *'Tis correct.* Carried away by the feelings of the moment—hurried on by the actual appearance to him, of the being he loved most; it would have evinced little knowledge of human nature if “the mighty master” had not allowed his feelings to govern him, and thus break at once into passion and enthusiasm. Pass this part of the play, and in no other place is this slight touch of the extravaganza perceived. Mark again this judgment. There is of course (and correctly) warmth and enthusiasm; but I cannot find out any part of the drama which glides into the bombast in the perceptible manner that this does.

What perfect music is in the vowels of the following line. I also beg of the reader to mark the

force, both of love and language in the word
 “wherefore.”

Romeo! Romeo!—*wherefore* art thou Romeo?

In the next line to this her love breaks out. She can no longer withhold even telling herself of it, and in the very second line that she speaks, she accordingly with solicitous fondness says,

Deny thy father, and refuse thy name,
 Or, if thou wilt not, *be but sworn my love,*
 And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

Romeo. Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at
 this. (*aside.*)

The judgment of this reply of Romeo's consists, *not* in the line itself, but in the direction of the inimitable painter to have it spoken “*aside.*”

How sweet and girlish, and how full of *satisfied* argument are the following lines.

'Tis not thy *name*, that is my enemy!
 What's in a name? that, which we call a rose
 By any other name would smell as sweet.
 So' Romeo would, (were he not Romeo called)
 Retain that *dear perfection* which he owns,
 Without that title; Romeo, quit thy name,
 And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
 Take all myself!*

* In writing this passage, I have made two alterations in it, which I think make it plainer. In the

Romeo's next answer discovers himself; and it is here that the judgment of Shakespeare more particularly evinces itself. Juliet is on the balcony, enjoying the "cool and silent hour," and totally heedless of every sight and sound, while her thoughts are wrapped up in "the one loved name." She perceives not Romeo—hears not Romeo; but is so completely lost in her own solitary and love-fraught musings, that she can do nothing, but as it were *think aloud* of the one on whom her heart is set. She can no longer contain herself, and she exclaims with the heedless but deep fondness of woman, "Take all myself!" On hearing this, Romeo can no longer withhold, and he accordingly says, "I take thee at thy word." She *then* discovers that Romeo (unheeded by her) has been listening all the while to her fond and tender exclamations, and after some further discourse, addresses him in the following

third line, I have inclosed some of the words in a parenthesis, joining them thus—"So Romeo would retain that dear perfection," &c. &c. In several editions they write the word "owes." I have made it *owns*, which makes both sense and grammar. The words "dear perfection," strike me as being very expressive. Mark the woman's love of "*Take all myself*."

sweet apostrophe. I mark some of the words in italics.

Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
 Else would a maiden blush *bepaint* my cheek,
 For that which thou hast heard me speak to night.
 Fain would I dwell on form; *fain, fain* deny
 What I have spoke; but farewell compliment—
 Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say, aye,
*And I will take thy word.**—Yet if thou swear'st,
 Thou may'st prove false; at lover's perjuries
 They say Jove laughs. Oh *gentle* Romeo,
 If thou dost love, pronounce it *faithfully*;
 Or, if thou think I am too quickly won,
 I'll be perverse, and say thee nay,
 So thou wilt woo; but else, *not for the world*.
 In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
 And, therefore, thou mayst think my 'haviour light,
 But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
 Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,†
 But that thou overheard'st, ere I was 'ware,
 My *true love's passion*; therefore pardon me,

* This is the finest stroke of *character* in this most musical speech.

† I request the reader to mark the great *naturalness* of this line—the three last words particularly..

And not impute this yielding to light love
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

Rom. Lady, by yonder blessed moon, I vow,
That tips with silver all these tree tops.

Jul. Oh! swear not by the moon, the inconstant
moon,

That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

Rom. What shall I swear by?

Jul. Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt; swear by thy gracious self,
Which is *the god of my idolatry*,
And I'll believe thee. —————

————— sweet, good night!

Rom. Oh! wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

Jul. What satisfaction can'st thou have *to night*?

Rom. Th' exchange of thy love's faithful vow
for mine.

Jul. I gave thee mine, *before* thou didst request it;
And yet I would it were to give again.

Rom. Wouldst thou withdraw it?—For what
purpose, love?

Jul. But to be frank, I give it thee *again*.
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep;—the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for *both** are infinite.

* *Id est*, bounty and love. Mark the false (but
womanish) philosophy of this.

I hear some noise within.—Dear love, adieu !
Sweet Montague be true ;
Stay but a little, I will come again.

Enter Juliet again.

Jul. If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee, my love, throughout the world.

————— but if thou mean'st not well,
I do beseech thee
To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief.
A thousand times good night.

She enters again.

Hist ! Romeo, Hist ! Oh for a falc'ner's voice
To lure this tassel-gentle back again—
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where echo lies,
And make her voice more hoarse than mine,
With repetition of my Romeo.

Rom. It is my love that calls upon my name.
How wond'rous sweet sound lovers' tongues by
night

Like softest music to attending ears !

Jul. Romeo !

Rom. My sweet !

Jul. At what o'clock to-morrow shall I send to
thee ?

Rom. By the hour of nine.

Jul. I will not fail. 'Tis twenty years till then.

I have forgot why I did call thee back.

Rom. Let me stand here till thou remember it.

Jul. I shall forget to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company.

Rom. And I'll stay here, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.

Jul. 'Tis almost morning. I would have thee
gone,

And yet *no farther* than a wanton's bird
That lets it hop a little from her hand
And with a *silk thread* pulls it back again,
So *loving jealous* of his liberty.

Rom. I would I were thy bird.

Jul. Sweet, so would I;

Yet, I should *kill thee with much cherishing*—
Good night, good night. Parting is such *sweet*
sorrow,

That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

Rom. Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy
breast,

Would, I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest.

I feel confident the reader will forgive me, for extracting so much of this beautiful dialogue. He who has any ear for music, will read this garden scene over and over again. Often as I have perused it (as well as the characters of Ham-

let and Othello) I even, at this hour, discover new beauties in *it* as well as *them*. It is *all* nature. There is no study—no art in it—no laboured and mawkish effusions of love. The lines are the very eloquence of love and music. Mark the winning gentleness—the girlish sweetness—the timid and shrinking, yet deep and overwhelming fondness of the interesting Juliet; and the unconquerable, enthusiastic, and idolatrous adoration of the “heart-smitten” Romeo. Never did I read a character where love was so omnipotent—affection and *constancy* so predominant, as in that of Juliet. Eloise, all Voltaire’s characters, Cleopatra, even those warm and winning fairy-forms from the voluptuous hand of Byron, fade and shrink before it. Juliet is all love, all gentleness, all woman. Love is her life and being. She lives in Romeo. She hears, sees, talks, thinks of nothing but “the god of her idolatry.” Even from the first moment she talks to him, she gives him her heart, after the insinuating discourse which he uses to her in the ball room. Mark the hurry, the first love, the fluttering fear of

Go ask his name. If he be married
My grave is like to be my wedding-bed.

Even in the ball-room, she cannot contain her

affection for him (for it is still the *heart* that is speaking) and she *instantly* enquires the name of the unknown who kissed her hand, and with it took her heart.

He is the ocean to the river of her thoughts.*

In the garden scene the eloquence of Juliet is beyond that of Romeo. Sweet and winning as are his words, there is not so much *character* in them as those of Juliet's. Here again mark the judgment. Love is woman's life. Should she not therefore be more eloquent on the subject which is in a manner *herself*? If the reader will look *attentively* at the entire of this most pleasing drama, he will still find this trait carried throughout *all* her language. It breathes in warm and

* I have here changed the personal pronouns. I look on this verse to contain the most beautiful metaphor in *one* line, in the entire compass of English poetry. Recollecting this, I *cannot* account for the strange taste of the inimitable author of it (Byron) in *adding* any thing to it. It stands thus in the original,

“She was the ocean to the river of his thoughts
Which terminated *all*.”

What use are the three last words. They cannot—they *do not* add to it. Addition spoils the line. Read it without them, (putting the period at “thoughts,”) and it is exquisitely beautiful.

vivid sighs in the night scene—glows with truth and fond ardour in the hour of her marriage—and deepens into despair, but *changeless* affection in the moment of trial and death. Looking at the character in this—in these lights, she is the most interesting of all the heroines of the “divine bard.” Ophelia and Desdemona are not to be excepted. It strikes me that correct taste would place Ophelia (before Desdemona) as the *second* most interesting heroine of his plays. Juliet is, in every respect, pre-eminently the first. She loves—she is crossed in love—her husband is banished—she is *commanded* to love another—she refuses—she entails the curse of her father—the very means she assumes to save her from marrying Paris, brings death not merely to herself, but to the being for whom alone she would live. This catastrophe is highly wrought, and most deeply affecting. And here, her love changes not. Even though there is *poison* on the lips of her lover, still she hugs—still she kisses him. In this scene the sound of his voice recalls back her fleeting senses. Mark the fondness—the sweetness of the following lines—

I know that voice! Its magic sweetness wakes
My tranced soul—I now remember well
Each circumstance—oh, my lord! my husband!

——— Let me touch

Thy hand, and touch the cordial of thy lips.

It would be wrong not to continue such melody.
I copy some lines more, taken from this harp of
“love and song.”

Jul. Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranite tree:
Believe me, Love, it was the nightingale.

Rom. It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale———

I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Jul. Yon light is not day light, I know it well.
Then stay awhile, thou shalt not go so soon.

Rom. Ah! Farewell, my Love! one kiss, and I'll
begone.

Jul. Art thou gone so? Love! Lord! Ah Hus-
band, Friend!

I must hear from thee *every day in th' hour,*

For in love's hours there are many days:

Oh! by this count I shall be much in years

Ere I again behold my Romeo.

Oh, thinkst thou we shall ever meet again?

Rom. I doubt it not.

Jul. Oh Heavens! I have an ill divining soul,
Methinks I see thee, now thou'rt parting from me
As one, dead in the bottom of a tomb!

I think all this excessively sweet—pre-eminently natural and tender. I beg to notice to the reader the great propriety of the repetition of the second line of Juliet's address respecting the nightingale. Likewise, the judgment of making her *commence* her discourse by the tender interrogatory of, "Wilt thou begone, Love?" I also notice the great naturalness of these two lines,

Yon light is *not* daylight, *I know it well.*

I must hear from thee every day in the hour.

I further remark the hurried eagerness, and fond delight, with which she catches the phial from the Friar, the contents of which are to induce the drowsiness which afterwards terminates so fatally.

Jul. (Taking the phial.) Give me! Oh, give me!
Tell me not of fear.

But extracts would multiply on me without end, from this interesting and *perfectly Italian* drama. One would almost think that Shakespeare sat amid the "starry skies and cloudless climes" of the calm and classic Italy. That he felt the warm inspiration and the voluptuous dreaming of a poet *born* in the amorous and sunny south; and that the spirits of Tasso, Catullus, and Ariosto hovered about him, while his rich and rapid pen was sketching off (vivid and beautiful) the warm and

love breathing scenes of his delightful "Romeo and Juliet." 'Tis nothing but love, and warmth, and imagination, and voluptuous attachment from beginning to end. All the picture is sketched in Italian painting. 'Tis all sunny hues and warm dyes. Fervour, and fondness, and most magical sweetness flow and irradiate from his pen while it is pourtraying the scenes and characters of this highly wrought drama.* The *music* which is to be found in its scenes, is I think superior to any other tones struck from the harp that this master of surpassing melody knew so *well* how to sweep. The chords of it are all strung to love. Blighted and unhappy, but fond and overwhelming love is his theme; and with mighty and magic touches—

* I refer the reader to the conversation between Nurse and Juliet, in the fifth scene of the second act, and request of him to mark the infinite effect of the repetition of—

Sweet, sweet, sweet Nurse, tell me what says my
love!

I also refer him to the vivid and love breathing soliloquy of—

Gallop apace, ye fiery footed steeds!

Here mark the force of "love performing night," and
"leap to these arms."

with tones of dark and most melancholy woe, he tells a tale of love—

That tale of true love, that never did run smooth !

Romeo is a most difficult character to perform. I shall own to the reader that (like the “Doricourt” of Mrs. Cowley) I never saw it performed yet. It requires so many things to act this character, that I almost despair of ever having the pleasure of seeing it *correctly* done. Feeling and judgment are indispensably necessary to perform the part. So it is with that master piece—Hamlet. I would however draw this distinction. There is (of the two) more of *feeling* than judgment, required in acting Romeo—more of *judgment* than feeling in acting Hamlet. Romeo is completely made, to tell

A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear
Such as would please.

I refer the reader to the part where he is first introduced, for the “first sitting” (if I may use the term) of his character. You are there told, not who, but *what* he is. I here adduce another instance of the judgment of this creator. Romeo is made to fall in love with a person whom he has as yet had no conversation with. This is romantic—and 'tis characteristic because romantic—

and 'tis dramatic because characteristic. I here will readily grant that it does not evince common sense; but this quality we really must forget in the lover. *In* this latter character *the master* wished to pourtray him, and he has accordingly *throughout*, done so. The acutest reader cannot find any scene—any *word* which does not evince the pensive but at the same time fervid lover. I know nothing more perfectly insinuating than his first brilliant but yet retiring address to Juliet at the masquerade.

If I profane, with my unworthy hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this.

The brilliancy consists in the last line—the timidness is expressed in the words “profane” and “unworthy.” I also quote his second and third replies to Juliet as instances of this insinuating manner.

The reader will here permit me (and perhaps he will understand the character the better) to draw a distinction between *genteel* manners and *insinuating* manners. I affirm then that a person may be genteel—nay, that he may be very genteel, and yet not be in the slightest degree insinuating; but—a person *cannot* be insinuating without being *eminently* genteel. Insinuating manners are, in a

manner, like talent—*born* with a person; now genteel manners can be *acquired*. For proofs of what I advance I ask the reader to go to the next party he may chance to be invited to, and he will there meet, a hundred persons who possess *genteel* manners, and perhaps about one who possesses *insinuating* manners. How comes this discrepancy it may be asked? I answer by saying, that to be insinuating, requires talent—graceful figure—sweet voice—great gentility—and a slight touch of the warm and playful “Charles,” of the brilliant Sheridan. Now these are qualities that are not always combined; and unless my observations deceive me, I remark that *this* character is to be seen in more *natural* perfection in the sister kingdom than in England. The Englishman is *constitutionally* dull; the Irishman *constitutionally* cheerful.

I perceive I am somewhat digressing, but I do so for the purpose of making myself more clear to the reader. The intuitive mind of Shakespeare then knew the advantage of insinuation in manner, and accordingly I bring up as proofs of it, the entire words of Romeo to Juliet; the addresses (the touches are slight but masterly) of Hamlet to the interesting Ophelia; the manly and warrior like, but soft and tender wooings of the Moor to

Desdemona ; and reciprocally, the soft and insinuating appeals of the gentle bride to her Lord, to have the disgraced favourite restored ; the pleadings of Isabella to the lustful Angelo ; all these (and many more) might be adduced to show how Shakespeare knew this trait of character ; and he accordingly has put into the mouths of those personages, the very sweetest music that the English language could possibly afford. This again is another proof of the versatility of his genius. He not only wrote in the tragical and comical, but (and it is a most difficult one) in the *amatory* style of poetry. The play I am now speaking of is the most eloquent instance of it. I here remark that since the death of this divine bard, there have been but two poets that have *completely* succeeded in this amatory style—Byron and Moore. The first unites nerve along with voluptuousness—the second, antithesis along with brilliancy. It might remain a question for the *genuine critic* (I regret to say a very rare character) to decide, which style would be best suited to lyrical and amatory poetry. It is in *song poetry* that Moore, pre-eminently and *dazzlingly* stands before every other writer since the days of the Greek Anacreon. In *this* respect I cannot help owning that the *songs* of Shakespeare fade before those of

this living Anacreon; and here I am greatly reminded of a *similarity* in style between some of the songs of Moore's great admirer (Byron) and the Dirge in the last act of Romeo and Juliet. If the critic looks attentively at both, he will find a striking similarity.

Were I to proceed further with these characters, I perceive I should be led on to an immeasurable length. It was my intention to have separated them and spoken of them in the order in which they appear in the title page, thus making distinct notices of each; but I found them so twined together that I could not *well* disjoin them; besides, in this age of divorces, it would be quite a serious thing, and matter for *legal* (if not critical inquiry) were I to separate Mrs. Romeo from her faithful and constant spouse. The only thing therefore which I shall further remark, is, that the next best drawn character in the play is Mercutio; and the fourth, the loquacious nurse.

I now enter on more difficult ground—Hamlet. This is the most *original* of the characters created by the first of dramatic writers. A quick eye *may* perceive some shades of similarity in others of his characters. *In* this—to this, there are none. Neither has Shakespeare himself, nor any

succeeding author attempted any imitation. It stands alone, unrivalled, and majestic—unimitated and inimitable.

He who performs Hamlet must be a critic—a gentleman—a scholar, and a *good* actor. He must possess a *graceful* figure, not a *fine* figure—he must have a *sweet* voice not a *strong* voice—he must be gifted with *insinuating* manners, not *genteel* manners—he must be a fluent and sweet declaimer, and not a turgid and studied one—he must possess the most exquisite judgment, and along with all these requisites, his acting (for he has half a dozen characters to assume) must be ALL NATURE. These are difficult and appalling obstacles; but I unhesitatingly assert that without all these, “the Prince of Denmark” cannot be effectively and completely personated; and *with* them, the character is perfectly and easily accomplished.

Speaking of the acting of this character would easily lead me to dilate on the topic; I reserve this however for the last pages, and shall proceed with this difficult and inimitable creation.

It strikes me that a good deal of judgment can often be perceived in the *introduction* of a character, either on the stage, in a poem, or in a

novel. I could adduce a great many instances of this nice trait in bringing in a leading character to the notice of the reader. There is scarcely any novel by that first novel writer of the day—Sir W. Scott, which has not this peculiarity, when he wishes to bring among his other subordinate personages, some leading favourite. There is some touch, some trait, some preparation, which goes as a forerunner to this favoured person, and then his reply or his speech invariably stamps, and as it were, lets you in (often in a line) to the character of the person.

There is an instance of this before me. Hamlet is introduced along with the king, queen, and lords and ladies of the court, but he remains silent and thoughtful—wrapped up in his lonely and lordly musings on the event which has so lately taken place, and which presses so on his memory. This is a retired but a striking touch of character. Further—he heeds not the glare and the show of the court—the flourish of trumpets and the pageantry that is passing round him; but lost in his reflections he does not speak, *until spoken to*. Then mark the depth and the pith of his two first replies—the first spoken so, as to be heard, and not to be heard. (The actor

who does not speak the words *thus*, speaks them wrong.)

Ham. A little more than kin,* and less than kind.

King. How is it that the cloud still hangs upon you?

Ham. Not so, my Lord; I am too much i' th' sun.

How sententious, and how completely in character with his soul, are these replies. The first (correctly) breaks in on the speech of the king. The second is at once ready and characteristic. Join these, with his two following replies to his mother, (the last, the best of the four,) and if the reader possess anything of quickness, he is at once let into the character of Hamlet. In this scene (and the words would be incorrect introduced earlier or later in the drama) he speaks the first of those inimitable soliloquies, than which, I know nothing more masterly in this divine bard. This soliloquy is not so hard to speak, as that grand piece of elocution and morality—

To be—or not to be—that is the question.

The reason of it is, that there must be the most acute judgment observed in delivering this last one. It is a cold, deep, pithy, moralizing piece of oratory, and it is one actor in a thousand that can

* This is the Teutonic word for child.

properly conceive the part. The acting must be nothing but *nature*. Ranting is here (and indeed throughout the entire of this masterly character) completely done away. I could scarcely conceive anything more perfectly sickening than to see "a robustious periwig pated fellow," go through this part with his turgid movements, his grand startings, and his see-saw motions. Hamlet must be played *differently* from all the other characters of Shakespeare. If a man does not possess *all* the requisites which I have already mentioned, I again repeat that he *cannot* do this princely and majestic personage.

I said that he who personated him, must assume half a dozen characters. He must not only *assume*, but he must *sustain* them. Here lies the difficulty—for—to *sustain* these characters, he must be gifted by NATURE with all the required endowments. There *may* be some other characters in these dramas (and perhaps I might be ready to admit it) where a fine flourish of hands, feet, and legs—a grand movement of some *mighty* fine bombastical arrangement, *might* for the moment strike, and perhaps deceive the eye; but in the royal Dane, it must be all temperance, and smoothness, and grace, and finished deportment. The very acutest judgment must be carried

through *every line* of it; if not, the personation degenerates into a sickening nothingness; and infinitely sooner would I prefer seeing the character *regularly and manfully* badly performed; than to have my ear tortured and nerves *dilapidated* by some vile *would-be* imitating the sublimity of it, and "curtailing it of its fair proportions."

I spoke of the different shades of character of Hamlet. Hamlet is a gentleman—mark his demeanour through the entire of the play. Hamlet is a critic—mark his *inimitable* directions to the players. Hamlet is a scholar—various passages of the drama evince it. Hamlet possessed insinuating manners—read his suasive addresses to the lovely Ophelia, and contrast *her* opinions and ideas of him. Hamlet possessed a graceful figure—vide act iii. scene 1. "The glass of fashion and the mould of form; the observed of all observers." Hamlet was a master of the graceful art of fencing—vide last act. Hamlet was a keen observer of human nature—take his pithy and correct remarks on man and the world, as examples of this. Hamlet appears in the character of *the lover*—(and to a critic's eye, *this* is quite a distinct personation)—mark his love for

Ophelia, and read these exquisite lines to her brother—

I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

The reader will allow me to call his attention to the three first words here—*so simple, so striking,*

I loved Ophelia!

Hamlet was a “courtier, soldier, and scholar.” The play tells us so. Hamlet assumed (and successfully maintained) the character of a madman.

I have here shown Hamlet in a variety of characters. This last observation however opens somewhat of a wider field to me.

I have heard it remarked by many, and have further perused laborious papers on the subject; that the madness of Hamlet was not assumed, but was *real*! This is a proposition which I must endeavour to distinctly combat; nor can I at all see, on what fair and tenable grounds, the supporters of such proposition can rest their arguments. It strikes me that the play is completely altered—the characters excessively lessened—the power and intellect of Hamlet made a nothing of—*if* this proposition can be made valid. How

greatly does Hamlet degenerate, if we consider his reason to be impaired. How far does he fall below that lordly (and I may add) *majestic* deportment—that high and grand solitariness of sentiment—that graceful and winning demeanour—which the poet has so nobly depicted him in, if we suppose him to be—an idiot. Look now on the other side of the picture. Suppose him not mad. Suppose him to be in full exercise of those powers of reasoning, and that depth of intellect which is the noblest gift of man; and *then* observe how much more highly he appears in our esteem. *This* view of the portrait, *makes* him Hamlet—that view of it, makes him almost the meanest character in the play. Yet again. I unhesitatingly assert that to assume and *perform well* on the stage, the character of either a madman or a drunkard, is one of the very hardest exertions in the histrionic art. This was one of Garrick's (Garrick—thou unimitated! thou inimitable!) most excelling personations. Every would-be actor thinks this, an excessively easy thing. I have seen some of them imitate the drunkard and the madman, and they have done it so abominably, that I have often shut my eyes, or else taken up the play bill and read it over about one hundred

times. *Why* is it hard to perform? Because the drunkard and the madman have thoughts, actions, opinions, conceits, and movements quite different from the every day persons that we meet in real life. They have, as it were, a world of their own. *Judgment* then (not *taste*—for taste and judgment are two perfectly distinct things) and *true* histrionic talent are absolutely necessary in personating either of these characters.

Now make the madness of Hamlet *real*, and you take away from him an excelling merit in the character. Make it *assumed*, and you *give* him this merit. But what are the facts (and as I am an unworthy follower of the Bar, I shall prove perverse and say, I *must* have facts) I say where are the *FACTS* which tell us that the madness of Hamlet is real? I have read the play over and over again to *try* and discover these said important facts, but I must confess unto the *mad manufacturers* of poor Hamlet that I could not even get a single tenable one which would hold good in any court of justice in His Britannic (or even Danish) Majesty's dominions—even though I got my sharpest wits and keenest Dollond spectacles to assist me in the search, backed too by a formal writ of—" *De lunatico inquirendo*."

What is almost the first expression of Hamlet to Horatio and Marcellus? Let us bring it into court.

Come here;————

How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself
As I, perchance, hereafter shall *think meet*
To put an antic disposition on—
That you never shall note, that you know aught
Of me.

Yet again—

Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore: your hands; you are welcome:—but my uncle-father, and my aunt-mother *are deceived*.

And again—

It is *not* madness

That I have uttered: *bring me to the test*
And I the matter will re-word; which madness
Would gambol from.

It is not my intention to bring up any more extracts than these few lines from this play. I consider even these, perfectly sufficient to establish the proposition which I have laid down; and I feel I would be but wasting both my time and my ink (and like Cowper's inkstand it is almost dried in the sun) were I to *waste* either, in attempting to establish “a self-evident proposition.” I how-

ever do not want to prove an unfair antagonist. If any "literary lady or gentleman" should choose to enter the lists with me, (for I know, many entertain the opinion,) I can pledge myself to them, that I shall *endeavour* to answer their arguments by more copious extracts, and more pressing proofs, should they favour me with any reply to this essay. Let me now return to Hamlet and his "fair Ophelia."

Hamlet was possessed of both taste and judgment. His remarks to the players confirm the first—his demeanor to the king and queen, the last. I know scarcely any thing which evinces so much taste, so much nice discrimination, such delicacy of conception, as his "advice to the players." (Oh! would that it were better attended to now-a-days.) In this, is set down the every precept which a finished actor should require; and so difficult is it for *one man* to unite in himself *all* the requisites which are there so nicely put forth, that *only* one man has been able to come up to, and obey them all; for there was no shade of character, either in tragedy or comedy that he could not perform.

I said that the love addresses of Hamlet to Ophelia were slightly touched, but done with a master's hand. I think the following excessively

beautiful, and greatly admire the ease with which he turns from the depth and morality of his soliloquy, to the beautiful form which crosses his sight.

Soft you, now!

The fair Ophelia:—nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.

Oph. Good, my Lord,
How does your honour for this many a day?

Ham. I humbly thank you; well.

The reader of taste will perceive the soft and suasive expressions in the first lines. He will further allow me to call his attention to the word “humbly,” and the slight hesitation or pause, (the actor who does not see this, leaves out a beauty,) before the word “well.” Put any other word in the place of “humbly,” and though it may express the *politesse* of Hamlet, it *cannot* give it the half mad, half sensible turn, which that single word conveys; and which it was Hamlet's intention to convey to his interesting interlocutor. As another instance of what I am speaking of, I adduce the

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

This, if possible, is more masterly than the former; though I have often endeavoured to *drill* into the thick pates of many of my companions *where* the beauty in it lay, which *they* would fain

affirm was gross and irrelevant. Shall I endeavour to explain where the judgment of this line lies? and I do fervently pray if I have got any aforesaid thick-pated animal reading my book, that he will even forthwith (but good humouredly) put it by.

The company are all assembled to see the play performed which Hamlet gets up for the purpose of "touching the conscience of the king." Here there is need of his utmost discretion and judgment, for the purpose of carrying on the plot of his assumed madness. If he addressed Ophelia untowardly and rudely, he would forsake his character both of courtier and gentleman. If he addressed her without *some* mixture of waywardness, he could not carry on his design. He therefore *prefaces* the blunt and amorous question in the above line, by the complimentary words of

No, good mother; here's metal more attractive.
and *then* he immediately turns to his fair interlocutor, and says,

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

There is inimitable propriety in both these lines. The last is a difficult line to speak correctly. I shall here remark to the reader, that I once heard a gentleman (in a drawing-room,) change this

last line, and place the verb in the potential mood, thus,

Lady, *may* I lie in your lap?

It struck me that this (at least the way *he* pronounced it,) had more of insinuation in it; and as we have got a great many readings of different parts of this celebrated poet, I mention this to the judicious actor for his perusal and observation. Had Hamlet at first said,

Lady, shall I lie at your *feet*?

it would have been *all* insinuation, and *no* waywardness. But spoken as it is, it indescribably gives us that mixture of politesse and forgetfulness, which it certainly was the author's intention to evince; nor can I by any means suppose that it was the intention of our author to give the following construction to *this* line, which construction, I have heard some say it bears, viz. "Lady, let me lie down at your feet, and then be kind enough to let me put my head in your lap;" and even though thus mentioned afterwards, (in some editions) it does not impugn the first reading of the line. It is awkward and distorted, nor does it evince any judgment in the writer. If we look at the line as above construed, it shows judgment (that pre-eminent quality) both in the cha-

racter and the creator of it. The scene from which I have taken these lines, is in the third act. This and the fifth are the two hardest acts for a judicious performer to get through in this admirable drama. In them it is pre-eminently necessary—

“To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.”

I have heard some advance, that the acting of Hamlet should all be governed by art. This is a dangerous argument to go on. If so, where is *nature*? If art governs the performer in his personation of Hamlet, then there is not the slightest use whatever in *natural acting*, which, I am simple and untutored enough to look on, as *the* greatest grace—the chiefest ornament—the *only* recommendation to the finished actor. To be a *finished* actor, is, indeed, a hard thing; it requires collegiate education—gentlemanly manners—knowledge of the world—immense versatility of mind—*genuine* talent—and eminent taste and eminent judgment. *With* these, a man can *claim* respect from an appreciating and discerning public, but without them, he treads hazardous ground, who attempts to personify Shakespeare and Otway, and has not the requisites I enumerate.

Shall I look on Hamlet (in parts of the play) in another character? If we allow his madness to

be assumed, (and I do not plainly see to the contrary) he appears in the light of an amateur performer. That he had a taste for the drama appears from his directions to the players—the action and emphasis (as well as the fidelity of his memory) in his quotation of Pyrrhus to the first actor—and his desire to have the players well lodged, and properly provided for. This is another respect in which this character bears the impress of an original. There is no other play which has a character of this cast in it. There is no other author who has attempted to place his hero in this commanding and *teaching* position. He tells the others exactly, nay critically, what to do; so that if he fails himself in *his* part of the drama, he but brings greater judgment against himself—another reason why the character of Hamlet can never be performed by a would-be actor.

I further spoke of much being expressed in a single line. This author has a wonderful facility in doing so. I here more particularly allude to the *first* lines which his characters speak, and these first lines are often extremely difficult to deliver. I adduce the following.

A little more than kin, and less than kind.

So foul and fair a day, I have not seen.

Three thousand ducats—Well?

It's better as it is.

I pray you, is Signor Montanto returned from the wars, or no?

My noble Lord, did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my Lady,

Know of your love?

(*Theseus.* Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.)

Hermia. So is Lysander.

Is the day so young?—Ah me! sad hours seem long.

What shall I say?—I cannot bring my tongue
To such a pace.

What would ye have, ye curs, that like nor peace
nor war?*

If it be love indeed tell me how much,

There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

A quick eye will instantly glean from looking at these lines (and comparing them with what surrounds them) the kinds of characters which follow. They are the prefaces, as it were, to the beautiful books of "men and manners" which the creator opens to you; and with *true* discrimi-

* This line (simple as it appears,) is, perhaps, the hardest in this drama to act. Coriolanus *cannot* be acted *now*. John Kemble is gone, and who is it that does not regret him.

nate tact—with *genuine* insight into mankind, he shows you, even in a line (Oh, thou excelling poet!) the disposition, force, bent—the complete temperament of either the hero or heroine which he intends developing to the delighted eye, with either the vivid colouring of his boundless fancy, or the creative strokes of his almighty invention. I am not aware that this beautiful (but hidden) touch of THE MASTER has been noticed before. I think it eminently striking. It is a touch of nature which I have never discovered in the would-be poet. You are obliged to *wade* through his characters to try and make them out. *The master* shows you at once what his creative pencil is going to develope on the glowing canvass—lets you in by this fine but hurried dash of that enchanting pencil what the scene and the character are to be which he is going to embody. Mark the intrusive question of the playful but proud Beatrice,

I pray you is Signor Montanto returned from the wars,
or no?

This question is put at a time when nobody in the company (mark this) was expecting the query; but her meddling spirit was busy—was on the stretch to hear about the very man whom she

doats on, and yet (out of womanish pride) hates ! Let me follow this again. Benedict comes in. He does not immediately address Beatrice. Now the young scamp (what else am I to call her) is dying to talk to him, and with the infinite cunning of woman she pretends to abuse him, *merely* to give herself an opportunity of speaking to the very man, that I feel perfectly confident she would have liked to have kissed!—aye *kissed*, reader, and if you are a female who are perusing these critiques, my knowledge of you deceives me, if I do not say so *correctly*. Here is the notable address :

I wonder that you will still be talking Signor
Benedict; *nobody marks you*.

Though *she* was “marking” every word he uttered. I call these two instances in this character, excelling nature. How completely, too, is the thoughtful lover recognized *instantly* in the two or three words—

Ah me! sad hours seem long.

Mark also the first words of Hamlet—the sententious and keen first words of Hamlet. They tell what was brooding in his mind. They are in a manner the “prologue” to the “play” which he was forming and planning in his lonely

and melancholy hours. But the opening words of Iago to Othello are pre-eminently striking. Mark the depth—the fawning solicitude—the suasive but serpent-like query of,

My noble Lord, did Michael Cassio, when you
Woodeed my Lady, know of your love ?

The reader will please remark it is not “my lord,” but “my *noble* lord.” The words, “so is Lysander,” *appear* nothing; but if the reader will look over the first act of the play, he will instantly see *why* Hermia spoke them. The two last lines (in the sentences) which I have quoted are from the play of Anthony and Cleopatra. How expressive are they of the mild and unrestrained love of each. In this play I have read scenes and passages on which I am confident Byron in a great measure formed himself—at least took instruction from. The following line recalls something of his lawless and lustful magnificence to me, but goes infinitely beyond him.

Eternity was in our lips and eyes !

There is but one line in the English language which rivals this. It is from the divine Milton :

Imparadised within each other's arms !

I perceive I am digressing. But Shakespeare

is inexhaustible. *You can scarcely wander from him; for wherever you turn—whatever book you open, (if the scenes and characters are drawn from nature,) there is THE MASTER before you.* All authors—all eminent poets draw from him. He is the overflowing and unsullied fountain, whose eternal freshness and inexhaustible springs fertilize and make glad whatever they run through. All read Shakespeare. All make extracts from him. All *understand* him. And why? Nature was his goddess. Nature was his preceptress. Nature was his hallowed divinity; and with the vivid touch of her inspiration—with the glowing fervour of her enchantment—with that boundless and unlimited command which she delegated to her darling, he wrote, he sketched, he delighted, he ASTONISHED! *

Bard of divinity! master of the heart! thou excelling poet of passion and feeling, what was not at thy command? Fear, hope, joy, sorrow, anger, hate, were all at thy sovereign disposal! and even in the soft and subduing passion of love—Oh, who doth go beyond thee! Is not thy pencil watered with the very tears of the maid, when sorrow would speak her heart? and is not it dipped in the bright colours of thy vivid fancy when it would depict “beauty in

smiles?" Hast thou not a magic music in that harp which heaven gave thee, and dost thou not run over, and thrill on its chords with a richness and a ravishment that the heart—the heart bows to and delighted owns! Where is the master that has come after thee—where he that has gone before thee? who has *dared* to touch those chords, over which an immortality doth hover!—No! There, at the foot of that throne on which thou sittest in unapproachable divinity, there doth that harp lie unswept—untouched—unawakened! mortal hath struck it but once; mortal cannot strike it again!

But hark! the forlorn Ophelia is singing.

He is dead and gone, Lady,

He is dead and gone;

At his head a grass green turf,

At his heels a stone.

There is exquisite beauty in this verse. There are two things which strike me in it. First, the sorrow which is expressed by the mournful iteration of the first line. Second, the inattention which is paid to the metre. A musical ear will instantly perceive the disparity of the numbers in the songs of Ophelia, and in this verse it is only the second and fourth lines which rhyme. Correctly. If Shakespeare had *studied* these songs, it would

have evinced no acquaintance with human nature. *The master* knew this, and with *true* discrimination, he writes as if he almost forgot metre, for, when did madness study? Listen to the wild but touching mournfulness—the irregular but overwhelming sorrow that his fingers strike from this harp of beauty, in the following heart-broken lines :

They bore him barefaced on the bier,
And on the grave rain'd many a tear;
Fare you well, my dove !
It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter. There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; Pray you, love, remember; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts. There's fennel for you, (*to the king.*) There's rue for you, (*to the queen,*) and here's some for me; there's a daisy; I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died. They say he made a good end. (*Sings.*)
For my bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.
And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No; no, he is dead,
Go to thy death bed,
He never will come again !

I challenge the best dramatic writers of either Italy, Germany, or England, to produce lines

which shall surpass these for *truth and nature*. I know nothing more moving—nothing more mournful than these slight, evanescent, but *inimitable* touches of misery and madness. She is introduced with flowers—ever the delight of the madwoman—and she gives fennel to the king—rue to the queen—and rue to *herself* (correctly,) and then she says that she would give them some violets, but (mark the exquisite turn) “*They wither’d all when my father died!*” she then kneels down and sings, still repeating and still turning on the same question. The reader will please mark the *abstraction* of the third line. She sings it to herself; and as if she forgot all the gaudy and gorgeous personages around her, tells herself to go and lie down on her death bed! *because,*

He *never* will come again!

I scarcely know where Shakespeare appears more eloquent in this play, than in this inimitable sketch of the fond, timid, deep loving, brain-warped Ophelia. He has drawn her a beautiful young creature with fond feelings and gentle disposition—unknown in the ways of the world, and as it were, unconscious of the charms and the beauty she possessed. Her heart is captivated by that most noble and eminently finished portrait, which

he has chosen for the hero of his play, and so alive is she to *anything* that concerns *him*, that even the *feigning* of madness in the object of her affections, strikes on her tender heart, and crushes it.* I here must not omit to turn to the first words which she utters, and I again find nature speaking :

Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark ?

The word "beauteous" particularly strikes me. It is so fond and womanish, and *also*, so perfectly irrelevant and maniacal; for what woman in her senses would rush into a court and ask for a

* I adduce this as *another* instance of the difficulty that lies in performing Hamlet. He who cannot perform this scene inimitably well (personating madness) *cannot* carry on the illusion; for *how* can the mind suppose Ophelia to lose her senses, unless Hamlet *makes* her believe that he is mad. I again repeat that there is no character in Shakespeare, in the performance of which there is so much *exquisite judgment* required as that of Hamlet.

I also remark, that in one of Ophelia's songs, there is an incorrect rhyme. "Valentine" rhymes to "be-time." This is the only instance of *complete* cacophony in the poetry of Shakespeare. It would be completely hypercritical to say, *this* was done purposely. It was done unknowingly, and *proves* the hurry in which the bard composed.

beauteous lover? But make her mad, and *then* see how appropriate is the adjective. Following the idea which is above suggested to me, I again turn to that part of the play where Ophelia is first introduced, and here I find her character developed (mark the power that sketched) in one short scene. I follow it throughout.

Ophelia and Laertes are introduced. The latter takes leave of her, and requests of her to write to him. She instantly replies with a sister's affection :

Do you doubt that?

I here remark, that instead of making a long speech to him, she answers him by interrogatory, at once short and sisterly. Her brother then proceeds to tell her of "Hamlet's favour," and cautions her from indulging in his fascinating society too much. The following is her reply—gentle and sensible.

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven ;
Whilst like a reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own road.

Her father is here introduced, and having caught the last words of Ophelia to her brother, he asks what it was Laertes was advising her about. Ophelia, like a true woman, tries to evade the query, and timidly, *merely* glances at their discourse.

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

This is another trait of character, and the actress who does not speak the line as above, speaks it incorrectly. Her father perceives she is somewhat avoiding him, and he accordingly says, "Give me up the truth." As she then *must* declare it, she tells the secret, and puts the word "*affection*" in place of *love*. Mark the correctness of this,

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders

Of his *affection* to me.

Polonius rallies her on this, and says that she speaks like an inexperienced girl. He then asks her, if she could rely on the proffers he had made her? Her answer to this is a very master-piece of *nature* and *character*, and the reader will please observe, that *both* are distinct.

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Can anything be more completely girlish—more sweetly feminine, than these simple words. Had she made a long speech on the (to *her*) important subject,

it would have disgusted any ear of taste ; but this single and simple line is a touch of nature, than which I know nothing finer in the drama. I proceed.

Polonius, on hearing her make this inexperienced declaration, tells her, that *he* will tell her “ what to think.” He desires her to be cautious in receiving the addresses of Hamlet, and informs her that she “ has taken these tenders for true pay, which are not sterling.” She instantly perceives that her father is about to discountenance the entire proceeding, and assuredly thinking that nothing could be dishonourable in the noble and finished courtier who had won her heart, she exclaims,

My Lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.

Polonius seems to laugh at her credulity, and says, “ go to—go to.” *Again* she harps on the word—*again* with the confiding fondness of youth and innocence, she tells of his vows and constancy.

And hath given countenance to his speech, my Lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

These are delightful touches from the pencil of *the master*. There are two things which I have

here to remark. When she finds that Polonius is going to blame her, for her too yielding confidence, she instantly drops the cold word of "affection," and introduces the stronger word of "love"—telling him he must be in earnest, as it is "*love in honourable fashion.*" The second thing, is, that she *joins* her replies together—

And hath given countenance, &c. &c.

Thus making it appear as if she did not heed (or *could* not heed) any word which her father might interpose, and as if she wanted to press on him another argument which *her* girlish simplicity thought would be conclusive. I am perfectly delighted with these exquisite strokes of nature. I here caution any vile actress from mangling these two replies, by pronouncing them coldly, and by repeating the first, *without* a mixture of surprize, which is difficult to delicately catch. I had the *happiness* of seeing this character performed once, (and but once, in Ireland,) and it was executed so barbarously, that the only thing I recollect respecting poor Ophelia, was—that it was performed by a woman. But to proceed.

Polonius still remains unbelieving. All her arguments—all her woman's rhetoric cannot shake the crafty experience of the old man. He there-

fore openly tells her, to give neither "words nor talk to the Lord Hamlet;" and desires her to, "Look to 't." The reply which she makes, *still* preserves her character. Had she *once more* attempted to remonstrate with her father, the interest of the character would be taken away, for it would have evinced her to be stiff and headstrong. Mark the gentle reply.

I shall obey, my Lord.

There is both sorrow and compliance expressed in these five words. He also correctly takes her off the stage, as if to let her in quiet feel the check which had been so suddenly given to her fond hopes. Here then is the entire character of Ophelia (at least to one who has ear and soul for strokes of nature) completely developed in one scene. I know nothing more gentle—more eloquent—more delightful—more fraught with the first tremblings of love and the trusting confidence of woman, than these single but pre-eminent touches of skill and mastery. All her replies are short—and all *in character*. How beautiful is the *sister*—the *daughter*—and the *lover* preserved throughout. How winning and how gentle—how tender and how fond—how submissive, and how *perfectly woman*, does she here

appear. The reader will perhaps require to look over it again. Like a beautiful and finished painting though, its master touches can never tire. I again introduce her.

She appears in the palace with all the lords and ladies of the court. Here her gentleness is again apparent, and her only remark is, "Madam, I wish it may," to the queen who hopes that by her interference, Hamlet may again resume his senses. The king and queen, &c. &c. retire. Ophelia remains, Hamlet enters and speaks that noble soliloquy, "To be or not to be." Ophelia comes forward, and requests of Hamlet to take back from her those remembrances, which in hours of love, he had bestowed on her. Hamlet (to carry on his plot) says he never gave her anything. Her reply to this sudden declaration, is full of suavity and fondness.

My honoured Lord, you know right well you did;
And with them words of so sweet breath compared,
As made the things more rich.* Their perfume lost
Take these again; for to the noble mind

* I have altered the punctuation of this line—putting a period at "rich." If the colon or semi-colon are retained; it does not keep the words and sense so distinct.

Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind.
There, my Lord.

Mark here, the *love* of "my *honoured* Lord"—the assuring testimony of, "You know *right well*"—and the fond compliment of, "words of so sweet breath compared." This *appears* easy to deliver. It is difficult. The difficulty lies in the first and last lines.

Hamlet proceeds to partly moralize with her, and draws some distinction between beauty and honesty, which she beautifully answers in one line. He then concludes by the startling words, "I did love you once." She instantly replies,

Indeed, my Lord, you made me believe so.

This is excessively natural. The force of the line lies in the word "indeed:" and the person who repeats it, should notice this, taking care to also lay an emphasis on the word "made." And yet this emphasis should not be so distinct as that on the word "indeed." If I could so express it, I would say, it should be *mezzo forte*. It is these finished and delicate modulations of accent and manner that mark the *true* actor or actress.

Hamlet (still carrying on his plot) now breaks out into more decisive language, and tells her, "he did not love her." How simple, but how

touching is her reply to the fatal declaration which warps her brain—

“ I was the more deceived !”

There are volumes in this, and it is consequently the *most* difficult line in this scene to deliver. She then exclaims, when she sees him using such untoward words and gestures—

Oh help him you sweet* heavens !

He again rallies her, and again her love breaks out for him in prayer—

Oh heavenly powers restore him !

Hamlet runs off, after again speaking to her in disjointed sentences, and the words which she then utters are full both of love and sorrow.

Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown !

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down !
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,
Oh, woe is me !

* The reader will please mark the force of “ sweet.” I cannot omit a word even in this divine bard.

I conclude these extracts by again repeating that this is one of Shakespeare's most beautifully drawn female portraits. With the exception of his Juliet, I know nothing beyond it for love, for tenderness, for constancy, and feminine sweetness. I shall now dismiss her (unwillingly I own) but must not forget to remark that her madness does *not* proceed from her father's death, (though I have heard it said that it does,) but from a conviction that the madness of Hamlet was real. Her innocence and tenderness could not endure the harshness of his conduct, and the unexpected turn which his deportment towards her takes; and she in consequence falls a victim—a victim too in the flower of her youth and her beauty, to a plot which the "purpose of his soul" would not allow him to swerve from. *Gentleness* seems to be the predominant quality of this interesting heroine. She wants the fervid warmth and powerful passion of "Juliet;" and therefore her heart is at once sensibly affected even by the *first* mad addresses of Hamlet to her; and I know scarcely anything in a young female (before she is led into the world) more attractive or pleasing than a gentle demeanour.

I must not here omit to remark, that other writers may, by the help of a fervid imagination,

throw together a splendid train of artificial images unfounded in nature, which please for a moment by their lustre and novelty; soon, though the *mental eye* becomes dazzled by the former, and fatigued from the latter. The mind strains itself to follow the flights of the author, but wearied by the effort, gladly descends to seek repose in the scenes of Shakespeare, painted with the faithful pencil of nature. The pictures of life and manners, drawn by most other writers, are improbable, unnatural, and distorted. Their characters are modified in every respect, foreign to real life, and are furnished with such qualities, passions, sentiments, actions, and situations, as are totally distinct from what mankind has ever experienced. In many tragedies, passion is converted into an instrument for the display of the author's powers of description; and the ever changing extensiveness of character is constrained into fixed rules and modes; for each person must be eminently virtuous, wise, or brave; or infamously depraved, weak, or mean. Instead of the sudden burst of anger, short, rapid, eager, and incoherent; we find the tardy pomp of declamation, and the elaborate arrangement of style. Instead of the expressive silence of grief, the suppressed sigh, the half uttered groan, the concise and piercing ex-

clamation that breaks from the wounded heart, we find a wearisome detail of grievances, and tedious, studied complainings, industriously polished with the trappings of partial imagery. I have heard and read of the passion of love, and I dare say it has sometimes actually appeared in the world, but if it has ever stormed, and ranted, and flamed, and raved; if it has ever flown to the empyrean realms of ecstasy, or sunk into the hideous abyss of despair, as it is represented by some of our *grand* novels, our scenic furiosos, and our *tremendous* actors, I might venture to believe that it is in bedlam alone we could expect to find it. Have I not heard the unmeaning plaudits of the multitude follow the plays of the Castle Spectre, Blue Beard, the Barmecide, and such other dramatic monsters? Have I not heard the novel-read Miss, with a head that could not discern, and a heart that could not feel, expatiate—enlarge—dilate on their merits in the hackneyed phrases of, “fine language, elegant sentiment! beautiful thoughts! delightful! sublime! heavenly!” And when I have expected to be enlightened by the manly observations of the firm and accurate judgment of a male critic on the plot, the characters, the passions, the incident, the dialogue, the conduct of the play; my ear has

been disgusted with some trite and idle exclamation of praise in dilating on some bombastic passage, whose chief excellence is, that it has a number of sounding words, heterogeneously strung together to serve as a cumbersome unadapted dress to "some unmeaning thing they call a thought."

Among the numerous commendations bestowed on Pizzaro, I have heard the loudest attributed to a part, which the laws of nature and just criticism would direct to be for ever suppressed. Rolla, in the fervour of enthusiastic friendship, impatient to execute his purpose, resolves on the salvation of Alonza's life by the sacrifice of his own. When he has gained admittance, however, to his friend's cell, over whose head fate hangs menacing and prepared to strike, (perhaps the next moment,) he stays calmly and deliberately to cull the flowers of poetry for the purpose of manufacturing an address to nature, and to tell, in a very philosophical manner to the audience, that the vulture is as careful of her young as the ring-dove. This might do very well in descriptive poetry, but there is in it nothing of the drama—*nothing of nature*—nothing of Shakespeare.

Mr. Sheridan made this very injudicious alteration. Rolla in the original merely utters a concise

ejaculation, at once sufficient and *natural*—such too, as the occasion would *obviously call forth*. But Sheridan, as a manager, knew what would please; and it is clear he consulted in the whole undertaking more his *pocket* than his *head*.* At the same time, I believe it to be one of the most beautiful specimens of the *romantic drama* that exists. There are some of the scenes most strikingly thrown together—and some of them which (to use common language) *run away with the heart*. I instance the last scene between Rolla and Pizzaro, and particularly when the former drops the dagger at the feet of Pizzaro. There is also powerful scenic delineation in the snatching of the child and sword, and the dropping dead at Cora's feet.

Still, though, would I doubt if it could shelter itself beneath the Aristotelian rules of the drama; nor can it claim those allowances to which Shakespeare's true delineation and unity of character, and faithful, *masterly* display of the passions amply entitle him. Does it not appear a

* I find it a most ungrateful task to say anything against my most favourite comic writer; and I shall excuse myself by saying that he was the translator, not the author of the play.

matter of astonishment that that writer who eminently united in his character, the orator, the statesman, and the dramatist; who was so capable of guiding the public taste to "the greatest ends by the justest means," and of blessing the literary world with the beautiful and vigorous issue of his own brain, should condescend to be the fosterer of a foreign and feeble progeny. Some of Kotzebue's admirers have drawn a parallel between him and Shakespeare, but (with a just exception to the beautiful play of the "Count of Burgundy—there are also some fine touches in "the Stranger") I can trace but feeble marks of similitude, save that they are both authors and dramatists; but we should remember that though the sovereign oak which seeks the skies, and the lowly hawthorn which grovels on the earth are both *trees*, yet how remotely different are they in nature, excellence, and greatness!

Speaking of this difference, induces me also to compare the characters of those writers who daub and scratch away for the purpose of filling up a circulating library, or killing the time of a miss vapid. If they can get tears to flow, and sighs to swell by being *mighty* distressing, *mighty* pretty, *mighty* magnanimous, (without one touch of *nature*,) why, they think they may rank themselves with a

Scott or a Goldsmith. What I would chiefly point the asperity of the critic and the moralist against, is that host of monstrous and despicable productions named *novels*; that daily issue from the press. In them we see characters whose felicity and misery are directed to objects; and promoted, retarded, and fulfilled by means which *never* affect mankind. They are placed in situations which have never occurred in the drama of life, and are preserved therein, or delivered therefrom by a concurrence of circumstances, causes, and effects, such as human nature never will know and never can know. Their motives of action are irrational and absurd—their passions are forced and unnatural—their virtues and vices are ever in the extreme—and their objects and feelings inconsistent with man's nature and man's conduct. Still this mass of absurdity is rendered more worthless by the poverty and sameness of thought—the florid feebleness of language—the incongruous combinations of style—the expanded nothingness—and the ridiculous pictures of never seen life. It is to the reading of *such* works therefore, that we may trace in a great measure that frivolity of employment—that imbecility and vacuity of mind—that fantastic extravagance and intolerance of thought and action which charac-

terize that rank of people, who, being elevated above the dread of want, the censures of their neighbours, and the necessity of thinking for themselves, seek, during one half of their time, a refuge from *self* in these books, and waste the other in the frantic whirl of folly.

I perceive I have made a digression, and have no doubt, shall accordingly be blamed for it. As my foot is already, then, on the path, I think I may as well tread away and make a *good fault* at once.

From this general censure I must except the writings of d'Arblay, Radcliffe, and Bennett. (Scott I have mentioned before, besides I cannot class him with *women*.*) The first has done all that genius enlisted beneath the banner of taste and virtue could do. When the second lady wrote her *Udolpho*, she should have ceased to write. In that work are displayed the wild and captivating treasure of fancy—the luxuriance and variety of scenery—the fair and picturesque charm of description—the awful terrors of romantic shades and superstitious gloom, and the thrilling scenery of forests, seas, cliffs, ivied towers, and mouldering ruins; in short, all that the sportive ardour of imagination could desire to revel in, and all that could awaken that

* Heaven help me! if the ladies see this censure.

secret, indefinable, and powerful emotion—that fearful and chilling, yet pleasing and resistless desire which draws the human breast towards what is mysterious and terrible. Though the mind, however, is kept on the stretch by this potent magic through the course of a long narrative, still like an elastic body (expanded to an unnatural and disproportioned tensity) will it soon relapse to its former tone, and recovering from the delusion, see in their true light, that the characters are unnatural and monstrous—the passions extravagant and inordinate—the morality unapt and ineffectual, and the situations, actions, motions, causes, and events, unparalleled and impossible. It sees that the whole work is an outrage to nature and truth, and dispassionately lays it by, to seek for profit in the beautiful and heart-touching scenes of Shakespeare; or, (correcting the words, and more pertinently, perhaps, as I speak of novels) to seek for profit in the beautiful and heart-touching scenes of *Scott*. (*That is the novel writer.*) It also sees that Mrs. Radcliffe having there exhausted all the characters of romance, could, in any future attempt do little more than transcribe them anew, with some slight indiscriminate alterations in scene and incident. She should, therefore, when she wrote that work

have laid down her pen—at least with respect to romances. She had sufficiently mazed herself and her readers in the wilds of imagination, and should have returned to mingle with and describe the world of real things. But I would not degrade her by pinning on her the housewife's apron, to learn to make Christmas pies, as Dr. Johnson said Mrs. Macauley should have been doing, instead of writing an history of England. She should have allowed her fame to rest on "*Udolpho*;" which, though not a solid, is a beautiful fabric; and has, if not the permanence and regularity of nature, at least the unconstrained and pleasing graces of fancy. If permitted to remain alone, it would have shone with conspicuous magnificence. As other structures are raised round it, she thereby divides and lessens the admiration due to the former, without fixing it on the latter.

* Mrs. Bennett has shown much genius in her

* In here speaking of female novel writers, I ought not to omit (though I have done so) alluding to the works of the pleasing Miss Edgeworth, as well as those of Hannah More. The former has already earned her own praise. With respect to the latter, it is *fashionable* to dispraise her, but I confess I refuse to do so. Her "*Lucilla*" is a most lovely portrait, and I perhaps shall regret that I do not more often meet the

very entertaining novel of "The Beggar Girl." I never met with any of her works till this capital performance fell into my hands; since then, I have valued it as an unfailing fund of profit and delight. It is one of those *few* books which can be perused a *second* time with pleasure.

But who is it that outshines them all in novel writing? Who is it that surpasses *every* writer that ever went before him in the *masterly* and mighty touches of nature, *description*, scenery, *dialogue*, and plot? Who is it that leads the mind along, as if it were listening to the tones of a harp struck with sweet and wizard touch?—Scott!—enchancing—powerful—imitated but inimitable Scott!

By the extensive multiplicity of his productions; the variety and novelty of his incidents; the number, discrimination, and *true* representation of character; the ease, aptness, and liveliness of his dialogue; the good humoured turn (when it does appear) of his wit; the *faithful* delineation of nature; the vigorous and skilful, (or to use the words of the celebrated Review of his country,) character in private life. I have seen *one* who eminently comes up to the portrait; and if her beautiful eyes read these lines, she can give me full credit for the affection with which I speak of and here allude to her.

“ the broad and blazing ” displays of passion ; the force, purity, and propriety of his morality ; the profoundness and *accuracy* of his observations ; the justice, obviousness, and beauty—the uncommon beauty of his *descriptions* ; his exact and unbounded knowledge of life and manners ; the depth, solidity, and critical acuteness of his judgment, and the ardour, fertility, and extent of his imagination ; “ the author of Waverly ” has established himself as the most ingenious and exquisite tale writer that England has ever produced.

Let the reader take up any of his tales, (and which of them am I to point out as the most beautiful ?) and whatever may be the disposition of such reader, or in whatever temper of mind he opens it, it will captivate his attention, and will suit with and charm each varying mood of head or heart.

If I mistake not his “ *Ivanhoe* ” is one of the most *vigorous* of his productions. There are three scenes in it that are truly enchanting. One is the combats of Ashby, the other is the scene between Rebecca and her passionate admirer—including also the description of the fray at the bar-bican (this is magic) and the other is the parting scene between Rebecca and her rival. These

scenes *live before you*. You behold them as plainly as if you were looking and witnessing them. Their intensity and beauty of description is both enchanting and magnificent. They strike the eye and reach the heart. While reading them—you are almost breathless, and you think you are in a theatre pausing on the tones and catching the words that live and lighten—and breathe and burn before you.

To *me* *Ivanhoe* appears the most beautiful of his works. Whether it is that it possesses so much of that dramatic cast which I so much admire, I will not exactly say. But I cannot *now* recollect having ever read a romantic history (for almost all his works have their ground-work from history) that so caught and captivated me. It is somewhat remarkable, too, that it is written entirely in English—no Scottish scenery; which shows that he can with as much ease send his muse to wander among the fertile and delightful plains of this fine country, and from thence bring him home flowers, sweets, and beauties, as he can make her roam among the wild and woody glens, the high and towering rocks, the ancient and ivied towers, and the lowly and humble cots of his own native and wild home.

In this work he has shown that he possesses

in an exalted degree, the faculty of calling into existence and reality whatever presents itself to his creative mind, and of giving the living and actual form to every human emotion and passion. Every page is graced with rich and various excellencies—with the beauties of fancy, of genius, of morality, of passion, and of nature.

But am I not wrong—am I not wrong, reader, in attempting to criticize a work that has already passed the ordeal of the puissant and tremendous reviewers of the North. *Their* fiat has been pronounced, and what need is there of *my* attempting to enlarge on what has received “the great seal of Scotland.” If *they* are severe though, I readily will award them good-nature, (that is, if they are not offended—always saving and barring their not being offended.) This being the case, then, I *must* think that they entertain no harm against me, and as I am not aware that I have offended them particularly (at least, as yet) I shall resume; for I must dwell with pleasure on a writer who has delighted me so much.

In this work, Sir W. SCOTT (I am here supposing him the author) has evinced what very great and powerful resources are ever at his hand. With such vigour, exactitude, and vivifying energy does he represent each circumstance—each situation—

each change of incident, time, and place ; in short, all those varieties, and minutenesses which must necessarily interfere in the actions of such a vast number of characters, *that the mind insensibly resigns the consciousness of being engaged in ideal scenes, and actually feels as if living, speaking, and acting in those of real life.* The force and fervour of his mind, while it summons into life; and throws forth the noblest fruits and fairest flowers of literary composition, can yet so far improve and sublimiate the meanest and most common weed, as to make it pleasing if not beautiful—attractive if not great. *Walter Scott is the Shakespeare of novel writers.* Few resemble him more in the well defined discrimination, the strictly preserved identity, the natural representation, and delicate developement of character. Few resemble him more, too, in the powerfully affecting touches of passion, and in the piercing, profound, and extensive sagacity of vision, into all the strange and complicated intricacies of the human breast. Like him, he has the art to give to his persons “a local habitation and a name”—a form and size—a palpable impression of living reality. Any common observer of men and manners, any unapt and uncouth hand, may exhibit the general character, the undistinguished mass of mind ; but to work

up this formless chaos into figured existence—to realize and perfect it with the minute and masterly strokes—the skilful touches of nature—the little starts, changes, and turns of humour, passion, inclination, and manners; and the varied involutions of opinion and observation which accident or situation produce on different minds (through all which the soul can be seen more distinctly, than through the more obtrusive parade of great and general qualities) and which stamp on the character life and force, and give it identity; to do *this* requires a spirited, vigorous, and life-giving hand of the first order; accurately and boundlessly versed in man and all his complicated ways; and such Sir W. Scott has here shown himself to possess. There are few books which contain a larger number of persons, and yet all are diversified from the highest to the lowest, with distinct and definite characters. Each has his own appropriate sphere, in which he ever moves and strictly sustains throughout, those peculiar traits which singularize him from every other. Madame d'Arblay has been justly censured for circumscribing the character of her “Cecilia,” with limits too strongly marked, and too inviolably preserved; but the strength and exactitude of that unrivalled historic fiction writer, Sir W.

Scott, showed him, that endlessly distinguished as the *branches* of human nature are by particular varieties, yet the *stems* always bear to each other a general resemblance. He has therefore avoided this error and painted his characters with more of the truth of nature, by sometimes tinging them with this hue of universal similitude. The art, too, with which he has contrasted them one with another, has seldom been equalled, and perhaps *never surpassed*. Each acts, and is so acted upon by its opponent, as to exhibit, with the most striking and manifest effect, the lights and shades of both. He never so eminently exalts his characters above, or so far sinks them beneath the standard of humanity as to remove them beyond our sympathy and interest. His heroine does not come forward with a splendid load of superhuman perfections like the "mawkish drabs" of other novels, whose *divine* accomplishments, *heavenly* qualifications, *sublime* attributes, are poured in on us at once in quantity and quality so disgusting, that a dose of *ippecacuanha* would be a recreation in comparison. The mind, person, graces, and virtues of Rebecca are gradually developed by her actions and situations, and by the approving testimony of the other characters. She is the most truly lovely, the most interesting, the most exem-

plary, the most natural, the best painted, and best preserved heroine of any exhibited on the English world of romance writing.

Oh, says some snarling critic, *you* praise her because a certain set of reviewers praise her. The remark, as it is irrelevant, so do I despise to answer it.

His beautiful tale of "the Heart of Mid Lothian" is lying before me. I cannot help remarking with what an exquisite hand he has drawn the character of the beautiful but unfortunate Euphemia. *Touches of nature* are scattered every where in the delineation of her character both brightly and profusely. The following is truly beautiful. I abridge it from her trial.

"Euphemia Deans," said the presiding judge, in an accent in which pity was blended with dignity, "stand up and listen to the criminal indictment now to be preferred against you."

The unhappy girl who had been stupified by the confusion of the crowd through which the guards had forced a passage, cast a bewildered look on the multitude of faces around her; and instinctively obeyed a command which sung in her ears like the trumpet of the judgment day.

"Put back your hair, Effie," said one of the macers. For her beautiful and abundant tresses

of long fair hair, which alas! Effie dared no longer to confine with the snood or ribband, which implied purity of maidenhood, now hung unbound and dishevelled over her face, and almost concealed her features. On receiving this hint from the attendant, she put back her locks, and showed to the whole audience, a countenance which though pale and emaciated, was so lovely amid its agony, that it called forth an universal murmur of compassion and sympathy." Her counsel proceeds. "In this fever, my Lord, she appears to have been deceived by the person who waited on her, and on recovering her senses, she found that she was childless in that abode of misery. Her infant had been carried off, perhaps for the worst purposes by the wretch who waited on her. It may have been *murdered* for what I can tell."

"He was here interrupted by a piercing shriek, uttered by the unfortunate prisoner. She was with difficulty brought to compose herself."

It is to this shriek I would call the attention of the reader. What a beautiful and *powerful* effect has it! and how *natural*!

His description too of her attitude when breathlessly waiting the arrival of her sister into court, whose evidence was so materially to affect her—lives before you as if you were looking at that

attitude in a painting hung by West in his gallery. I quote.

“ Her sister was called, and she instantly started up and stretched herself half way over the bar towards the side at which her sister was to enter. And when slowly following the officer she advanced to the foot of the table, Effie, with the whole expression of her countenance altered from that of confused shame and dismay, to an eager, imploring, and almost ecstatic earnestness of entreaty, with outstretched hands, hair streaming back, eyes raised eagerly to her sister’s face, and glistening through tears, exclaimed in a tone which went through the heart of all who heard her——“ O Jeanie, Jeanie, save me, save me !” I cannot praise this. ’Tis beyond all praise.

I must now come back more immediately to my subject, and like a truant school-boy, ask pardon for having forgotten the task given to me. I however doubt though, if I shall ask forgiveness *reverently* from the reader, for he must recollect that if I *have* strayed a little from the beaten path, I yet have regaled him with a repast served up by that delightful *restaurateur*—Walter Scott. Beaten paths too are a thing that I am not over and above fond of trudging in, so that I *must* walk about a little to renovate myself; besides too I

told the reader that I was going to make a digression, and I believe I have made *a good one*.

Still though I should imagine that talking of Walter Scott is not exactly foreign to my purpose. I wanted to draw a comparison between him and *Shakespeare*, and accordingly have done so; so that if the reader will but please to recollect the thing, he will see that the fault of the digression is not altogether so bad as what it might otherwise appear, did I not brush up his memory with this hint.

To resume however.

Can such characters as those I *spake* (not such as I *speak*) of, interest the heart? Can such superhuman beings call forth the reader's sympathy? No surely. (How different with *Shakespeare*!) The consciousness that the scenes in which they are engaged have never been paralleled in life—that such forced hyperbolical and extraordinary passions and feelings—joys and misfortunes—virtues and vices—have never actuated the human breast, and were never exhibited on the theatre of the world, will haunt the mind, and repress the sympathetic movements of the heart. The heat and activity of the author's genius *may* throw over his personages the gloss of wit, knowledge, and eloquence, and thus catch for a mo-

ment the eye; but their influence stops there, they make no progress to the heart, for they will still appear to me as beings of another order—another nature, who have no relation to me or mankind, and cannot therefore create in me aught of sympathy or interest. I shall look on them as on the figures raised by the magic glass, with whom I have no connexion—whose existence I know to be unreal—whose strangeness and splendour attract my attention for a moment, and then pass away and are forgotten.

Yet further. Let us look to those characters as delineated by different authors, we shall find nearly the entire of them moulded from the same impression, and continued from one to another, unvaried in aught but by being arrayed in another style, or viewed through another medium, by some unimportant changes in situations, actions, and circumstances. We see the same feature of unattainable excellence in each hero and heroine—of superlative courage, magnanimity, and unbending virtue in each warrior—of uniform dignity in each king—and of unparalleled purity or depravity in each virtuous or vicious character. They are all *family likenesses*; all of the same class, undistinguished but by a difference in the style of shades and colours; yet the lines

of separation between the latter are so imperfectly defined, and the former melt into each other with such languid discrimination, that they rather connect and establish, than annul the resemblance. But the characters of Shakespeare are no second hand copies, meanly stolen from preceding authors, and varnished over to deceive the injudicious eye. His mighty mind disdained such sordid traffic. He drew the originals themselves, and having exhausted the almost infinite variety of human nature, he then repaired to the fountain head of his own uncircumscribed imagination, and bade the rich streams flow from thence with all the conscious energy of native excellence. His characters are frequently numerous, even to excess, and yet in all those multitudes that people his dramas, and move in such rapid succession through his scenes, no two shall ever be found alike. Though this may not at first strike a superficial view, yet a nearer examination will always evince some well-marked (though perhaps not immediately obvious) limit, that separates them and stamps the distinction.

His representations of life appear rather *originals* than *copies*. He viewed the wide labyrinth of human nature with an acuteness of vision, and extensiveness of observation, such as *no other*

mortal has ever been favoured with, and painted from thence with such accuracy, fidelity, and vigour, that a being of another sphere could (from the study of his works) judge of each character and "scene of this many coloured life" with nearly as much precision as though he himself had been an actor and an observer. In Shakespeare's personages we find no distorted aggravations—no hideous caricatures of mental deformity—no well polished pictures of internal and external symmetrical perfection. They are men and women, not male and female Gods and Goddesses, whom he has laid before our view; who are actuated by the same motives, passions, and interests, which always sway the human breast, and who look forward to such objects, move in such situations, and are shrouded by the shade of misery, or illumined by the ray of happiness, through such means as I myself may feel. 'Tis with such characters as these I can feel myself interested, as though it were by that universal chain which binds mankind together. 'Tis with their sorrows—their joys—that I can yield my whole heart to sympathetic delusion, and in the enthusiasm of feeling overleaping the bounds, dividing reality from fiction, be a fellow sufferer myself.

Even where our bard's creative mind fled beyond the limits of this "visible diurnal sphere," to stray amidst the worlds of imagination, yet there did nature* attend him; and while fancy, with irregular and rapid step, led him through her magic regions—her hanging rocks and foaming cataracts—her gloomy caverns and shades—her savage desarts and darkening tempests; or, amidst her autumnal hills and vales—her cloudless skies—her zephyrs, meads, and streams, and all her fairest views; yet still his "mighty mother"† held her faithful glass before his eye, as it ranged over each enchanted scene, and

————— "In a fine frenzy rolling,
Glanced from heav'n to earth, from earth to heaven."

and thus guided—swayed—and illumined its beautiful and creative movements.

It has been asserted by some as a bar to that

* *The Tempest*, if I mistake not, is one of the justest and most beautiful specimens of the fair and artful combination of nature with fancy, that any age or nation can exhibit.

† Thus nature is characterized in Gray's sublime Ode of the "Progress of Poesy."

originality to which none was more liberally entitled than Shakespeare; that he was skilled in languages both ancient and modern. This requires examination. Ben Jonson,* who knew him well, says that he was ignorant of Greek, and so moderately acquainted with the Latin language, that he never attained to facility in reading it. It is likewise advanced in support of the above ill founded assertion, that some thoughts and images of Shakespeare, bear a near resemblance to, and were stolen from, some passages in the Classics. 'Tis true there is a similarity discoverable in some parts; but let it be considered that most of the ancients, as well as Shakespeare, were accurate and attentive students of nature,

* It would be an unjust omission not to observe that Shakespeare, rich in generosity as in genius, and with a nobility of soul that disdained the selfish views of envy, or the fear of rivalry, not only introduced Jonson to the royal patronage, but established an infant play of his on the stage. Indeed, dramatic talent should be "a citizen of the world;" and *interest* should have nothing whatsoever to do with the rejection or reception of manuscripts. The directors of a theatre, should look *alone* to the MERIT of the piece, and forget both authors and friends.

and it will then no longer be believed that a knowledge of the writings of the former, was necessary to make the latter sometimes think and speak like them. Two poets who walk through nature's kingdom, will often in their various wanderings, undesignedly and unknown to each other, stray into the same path, meet with the same fruits and flowers, haunt the same hill, or seek the same shade. In the eastern world, where the hallowed Ganges pours his broad wave, and in the western, where the Orellana rolls through unnumbered nations, as the rude inhabitant of either wanders on the bank and marks the morning sun look from the hills and shed his glories on their surface, will not the same emotions dilate the bosom of each, and the same fervid prayer rise from each heart to that all ruling being, who nature tells them, bade the sun to shine and the stream to flow?

Shakespeare has, indeed, drawn the plots of many of his plays from Plutarch, Plautus, Lucian, the Roman historians, and Italian novelists. But this affords no conviction that he was versed in the *originals*; for, from the most accurate investigation, it appears that translations *alone* were the medium through which he had recourse to

them ; and, as a presumptive proof of this, it also appears that it was *only* from those foreign works, which at that time were transferred into the English language, that he has devised his plots. His obligations extend no farther ; and he rather dignifies others than debases himself, where he condescends to be indebted to them. The groundwork may be another's ; but the beauteous and majestic fabric is *his own*. The characters are his own—he animates them and works them up into existence. He gives them their very form and pressure—creating them according to those just, faithful, and perfect models, which, without number, peopled his unbounded mind. He finishes them with such a masterly well-skilled hand—such true discriminative judgment—such exquisitely wrought strokes of nature, and such piercing faculty of vision through the vast and many-winding labyrinth of the human heart, that it requires no uncommon portion of critical sagacity to see that he neither needed nor used any other resources than those his own illimitable genius supplied him with. His thoughts and his images are his own ; for could *he*, whose ample eye drew in the *true horizon* of the world of nature, could *he*, I say, deign to copy the confined and spiritless paintings of

those, whose feeble vision extended not beyond that narrow circle which limits the sight of *common* mortals. But his thoughts and his images bear in themselves sufficient testimony that they are the genuine progeny of Shakespeare. They possess the warmth, vigour, truth, and form of a first-hand original impression, draughted in the glow of nature, and coloured with the vividness of fancy !

It is one of Shakespeare's excellencies, perhaps peculiar to himself, that he, who in understanding and knowledge has not attained even the rank of mediocrity, is equally adequate with the most eminent scholar to imbibe amusement and instruction from his works. An effusion of the genuine feelings of the heart—a just picture of life, nature, and character—a pervading sentiment of morality—an acuteness founded on observation and experience—a clear and obvious reasoning, unclouded by sophistical perplexities—wit undebased by affectation, and undistorted by extravagance, situation, and circumstances ; all these, ignorance itself can appreciate and understand ; while the deep-inquiring critic confesses them the basis of that lofty and *eternal* monument of merit and fame that towers proud and high above the low and tottering piles of other poets !

Thus is Shakespeare the poet of every rank and of every age; and thus does each father deliver to his son, from generation to generation, the inestimable legacy of his writings, and bids him revere them as the productions of the moralist, the wit, and the deep-skilled adept in the heart of man; which have moved, delighted, and instructed himself, and will continue to move, delight, and instruct until human nature change.

Among those qualities which have ennobled Shakespeare above the sons of men, his fancy stands in the foremost rank.

“Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
“And panting Time toiled after him in vain.”

When viewed in this light, he appears more fully in his character of *poet*; stationed in the foreground, conspicuous, unrivalled, and alone!

Save two, from the countless thousands that have in every age aspired to the laurel of poetic fame, there are *none others* who are entitled to dispute with him the dignified distinction. These are our own Milton and the Grecian Homer. It would be an arduous office to assign with strict justice the palm of victory to this godlike triumvirate. Yet would I, though with fear and trem-

bling, dare to adjudge it to Shakespeare, not only in preference to Milton, but to Homer.

But here the puissant Pope * is in arms against me, as well as all the classical prejudices of every scholar, from Longinus down to the pedantic schoolmaster, "who mouths out Homer's Greek like thunder," and neglects the noble fire, pregnant thought, and simple majesty of the poet, whilst his cold head traces his verses through grammar, case, and gender. But perhaps I am partial; and, as Pope himself allows Shakespeare's superior skill in *nature*, his most ardent admirer may well remit his zeal, without vainly endeavouring to assert his pre-eminence in *fancy* above the Grecian bard, the venerable "father of verse."

With respect to Milton; the universal and stupendous greatness, the awful sublimity of the *subject* of *Paradise Lost*, seem at first sight to fix the wavering balance in his favour. But let us look with the naked unbiassed eye of truth and justice, and it will be found that this greatness, this sublimity in the *subject*, acts as a magnifying glass, which falsely enlarges the merit of the *per-*

* Vide Pope's preface to his translation of the *Iliad*, more particularly his own comparison between Homer and the other poets.

formance. This is an observation which I am surprised has never occurred to his commentators and critics: one even of mean talents, when employing them in the description of things vast, splendid, and uncommon, will receive from them a lustre and importance which may easily deceive the eye, as the emanation of intrinsic excellence. When we take up Milton's book, the revolutions of heaven and of hell—the tremendous majesty of Omnipotence—the creation of the world—the formation of man—his state of bliss and subsequent fall, pass in awful review before our eyes, as objects of astonishing and boundless grandeur and magnitude; objects over which religion has thrown the hue of fearful veneration, and which custom has taught us to reverence. And thus are we prepared to look up to him with admiration and esteem, whether sanctioned or not by the assent of justice. Though his performance is unquestionably *equal* to his subject, and though he shines with holy and transcendent magnificence, yet does he, in some places, sink below other poets as far as he at other times rises great and glorious above them. Unlike theirs, his flights of imagination are not temperate and even; but are of that kind which dazzles and overpowers you. His brightness (and it is a heavenly and a holy bright-

ness) is as the splendour of a comet, which flames on the brow of night, and then vanishes, leaving the beholder to gaze on the grandeur which lightened from it, even though the heaven which it has left is shrouded in darkness.

Far be it from me to try and depreciate the bard of heaven. None can more truly admire—none can more deeply feel the beauty and the majesty of his song. Angels touched his harp, and why should it not be beautiful. Inspiration breathed through its tones, and why should it not be divine! With an unawed and a giant step he strides over the grovellers that bow and crouch to him, and sits throned and towering amid the god-like few whom Poesy bows to as its *only* “triumvirate.”

I write this for the purpose of comparison. Under *this* idea, my warmth will be allowed a little latitude.

Let it then be remembered, that few, if any, have possessed such profound and extensive learning as Milton. He not only was an accomplished proficient in the Greek and Latin languages, but also perfectly understood the Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldean, and most of the modern languages of Europe. So that his mind was a vast repository of the knowledge of all ages and

nations ; and it would be a vain and idle argument to pretend that he borrowed nought from thence, to enrich his writings. A slight acquaintance with them will evince the contrary.

But Shakespeare was indebted to *none*. His powerful mind neither sought for, nor required the assistance of any. Milton himself bestows on him the title of "*Fancy's child*." The expression is not, *one* of Fancy's children—but as if *he alone* were the sole and the legitimate offspring of that lovely goddess.

The epithet is in that beautiful poem, "*L'Allegro*," which, had he written nothing else, would have raised his name above the sons of men.

"Sweetest Shakespeare, *Fancy's child*,
Warbled his *native* wood-notes wild."

He was Fancy's child indeed. It was she who gave to his infant fingers that harp which he awoke with that wild melody which chains the listening soul in enraptured attention. His was the strength, and the power, and the beauty, and the might. His was the livingness which could impart to thought a form and size—to things inanimate, existence—to things mortal, immortality. His was the power—the unbounded and mighty power (that power which was like

the creative hand when it brooded over chaos) to call beings when he willed, and forms when he chose !

Criticism is disarmed when it looks to his *fancy*. However reprehensible he may sometimes be in his representations of nature, he in *this* particular soars above the most scrutinizing malignity of the critic. Its flame ever burns with a pure, steady, and vigorous fervour. As the sun's evening ray mild but beautiful, it shines in the "Midsummer's Night's Dream." As his noontide brightness, it glows in the "Tempest," and as his lowering front looking through the storm's blackening clouds, it glares with terrible splendour in "Macbeth."

Our heaven-inspired bard was lord of all the passions which agitate the human breast. Nature herself delegated to him the sceptre of their command, and with an uncontrolled and immediate force he sends them forth to excite, to sooth, to draw the tear of sympathy, or raise the fire of vengeance. When guilt, beneath the shades of night gives utterance to the pang of remorse—when the strains of innocence, of mirth, of wit, and humour strike on the heart—when horror stalks abroad and sheds on the threatening gloom

a deeper gloom—when love sighs forth his soft complaints—when oppression extends his iron rod—when grief pours forth the loud sigh in mournful succession, or bends in mute uncomplaining submission beneath the stroke of fate;—is there a heart that does not heave to such varying emotion, or an eye that does not let fall the sacred drop of accordant feeling?

Oh! thou hallowed spirit! whose powerful hand could thus lead the subject mind at will! Thou heavenly harper! whose touches thrill through the inmost soul, and fix it in a dream of delirium! Thou mortal-god! to whom the heart bows, as if *thou alone* couldst claim its worship! Thou—oh thou!—while listening to whose music, I have forgotten the cheerless and heavy weight of sickness, and with whose magic touches I quickened the pace of tedious time; tell me—say, in what new and glorious light shall I yet consider thee? Livest thou in thy heaven so high and immortal that the harps which surround thee cannot admit the dull offerings of notes untuned as mine! or sittest thou on thy own throne, so mighty and majestic, that even praise thou lookest down on, and despisest? Who shall give thee a *worthy* offering? Who shall award to thee a praise, meet

as thy Fancy—boundless as thy Fame? With adoration have I viewed thee, as fancy's *favourite* son—as the vicegerent of nature—as the master of the passions—as the well-skilled teacher of the human heart. Yet dost thou still enjoy a more illustrious station, wherein thou surpassest the conquerors and princes of the earth. For thou art the moralist, whose pure, just, and rich precepts, warmed by virtue and guided by the keenest insight into the mind of man, can direct the fiery eye of youth—give vigour to the impotence of vision in old age, and can guide the novice in experience and virtue, with honour and propriety through this earthly labyrinth of vice and folly.

How unwillingly, then, do I now turn to the following.

I have hitherto but exhibited the brightness of the picture, I would now be unwelcomely asked to point out its shades. It is an ungrateful, an unpleasing office. Shall I now seek for specks in the sun of glory? Shall I now look for a sterile branch or faded leaf in the luxuriant and imperial oak? Shall I now search for the ruggedness of a stone in the graceful and noble fabric of excellence and fame? Yet, as my object was to write on the *genius* of Shakespeare my task would not be fulfilled did I not notice the obscurities that clouded,

as well as the lustre that illuminated it. I shall therefore glance at his most obvious faults, leaving it to others more able or more willing to comment more largely on them.

I have commended his scenes as deeply interesting, though they often fail of this effect; by their tediousness, the negligence of the author, and the quantity of *unnecessary* and unavailing matter that *retards* the main business and fatigues the mind. I have commended his characters as natural, though they not unfrequently act and speak extravagantly and unnaturally. I have spoken of his wit as not affected nor artificial, though it often degenerates into puerile conceits. He is often obscure, clouded, and embarrassed; but this is more the consequence of his own *haste and indolence*, than of the deficiency of his genius. As he found his plots, so he preserved them. Insomuch, that when the display, the elevation, or the beautifying of character, circumstance, passion, description, or moral, would have been the result of even a slight alteration, his blindness or his negligence (indubitably the latter) prevented him from taking advantage of it.

The frequent indelicacy and grossness of his comedy, the unrefinement of his age can scarcely justify. But let us remember that he composed

with a rapidity and luxuriance even to a fault, and that his known carelessness, hurry, and inattention prevented him from practising,

“The last and greatest art, the art to blot.”

Besides, as he wrote less for future fame, than present popularity, he was obliged in some measure to conform to that lowness, obscenity, and impure witticism, which were the prevalent taste of the times. I am conscious he was not indecent through *choice*; for a *great* mind *naturally* revolts with disgust and abhorrence from whatever would awake the most transient blush on the cheek of modesty.

In his tragedy are instances of ineffectual emptiness, unproductive effort, and weak and useless declamation. Insomuch, that, save where passion and character invigorate the scene, he is often tedious, vapid, and feeble.

But, back to my more pleasing subject. It is ungrateful to find fault where so much beauty dwells—useless to look for specks when all is bright and splendid. Do we mind the cloud that obscures the sun when his glory bursts and burns underneath it? or seek we for the turbid wave in the stream when its waters roll clear and calm, and breathe music as they flow and rush along? Oh! surely the mind must be malignant that

would thus act—surely the eye must be distempered that would thus look. Gaze on the full, dark, and bright eye of woman, and tell me if you will stop to consider whether the brow which overshadows it has scorn or distance in it? Irresistibly you gaze—irresistibly you feel. *What*, you cannot tell; but you only know that beauty (contrast the eye and the writings) allures—captivates—enchains—enthralles you. I cannot suppose you so dull, as to be insensible to the magic of the one, or the melody of the other. If you are, I have written but in vain. Voice of mine you will not care about, and had I the sweetness of a Moore to allure you, the attempt would be but unavailing. On the other hand, if you are the reader of taste and talent—if you take pleasure in whatever belongs to the drama—if you admire the works of poesy and song, and thrill with the high and indescribable throb of delight, when listening to the harp of nature swept by this son of glory and of science—to such would I turn with pleasure—to such would I present my imperfect lines, and to such would I ask of them to excuse whatever faults may be found in it. My *intention* has been to try and amuse the leisure hour of the critic, and to add a mite of praise to the immortal honours of our bard. Perhaps the colouring is somewhat too

warm; but it must be recollected that years not many have produced it. Youth is not exactly the season for cold and prosaic praise on a subject which *might* be capable of invigorating and warming even old age. The heart of *such* a person wants tutoring on a theme that possesses a capability of affording it latitude and glowingness of idea. Correctly to stop, I knew not where. *Properly*, to go on I almost feared. To the hands, then, of the more liberal and experienced I confide it—satisfied that the faults (I own to them) of it will be told me, not with the snarling censure of the pedant, but with the enlightened tone of the *refined* critic. I could almost wish that all of this class would let me and my poor work alone, except two branches. The intelligent reader will guess that I allude to a celebrated northern and southern set. If I *am* to be mangled, I would rather it was done by those who know how to do it *properly*, and not by those who seem to take a certain delight in looking at the dark side of the picture without ever casting a glance at the bright. There is a wide difference between the critic and the censorer. To the former I confide myself—to the latter I have nothing further to say.

To conclude, then.

After an impartial review of the labours of

Shakespeare, and with the candid allowances due to human imperfection, he may safely be pronounced the greatest of poets, and the most illustrious ornament that ever exalted the dignity of the race of man. We *may* have another Milton—We *may* see another Homer—ETERNITY HAS BUT ONE SHAKESPEARE.

A LETTER
ON
TASTE, JUDGMENT,
AND
RHETORICAL EXPRESSION.



A LETTER
ON
TASTE, JUDGMENT,
AND
RHETORICAL EXPRESSION.

“ Gods! on those boards shall folly raise her head, where
Garrick trod !”

BYRON.

“ He who refines the public taste, is a public benefactor.”

JOHNSON.

IN receiving and replying to the letter with which your Lordship has favoured me, I have at once to express my pleasure and my embarrassment—pleasure, at its agreeable contents; embarrassment, at its difficult injunction. You desire me to send you critical definitions of TASTE and JUDGMENT, (including general observations) and, at the same time, requiring from me remarks on the principal performers, who at present occupy the London stage. I own, my Lord, that you could scarcely have given me a more difficult

thing to do; and when I recollect the weak pen which is at present running over this paper, I would willingly request of you to have made the demand on some more able person of your numerous correspondents. I am aware too, of the great difficulty of epistolary composition; and that it requires something besides mere words and mere periods to make up that light and playful fascination which belongs to its style. Singled out by your Lordship, however, for the task, and recollecting that a little dash of satire cannot be of the least harm, on the present state of the drama in London, I shall proceed. I shall despatch a messenger to *Juvenal* for one of his pens, and at the same time request of him to glide in through one of the windows of your Lordship's delightful seat, and politely ask you for some of your good humour; for in truth, my Lord, *when* I look around me, and perceive the declining state of *genuine* comedy and *genuine* tragedy; I scarcely know whether most to mourn or to satirize. I shall at once, however, enter on my subject; and forgetting any further useless apology, leave it to reviewers, critics, and *would be's*, to cut me up.

TASTE is nice and *quick* discrimination, joined to cultivated talent.

JUDGMENT is depth and solidity of intellect, joined to sound sense.*

Both (though often confounded) are perfectly distinct—for

A man may possess the most solid judgment, and yet possess no taste; and

A man may be gifted with correct taste, and yet want the sterling and useful quality, judgment.

Both must be possessed in an *eminent* degree to form a great poet, a great painter, a great actor, a great musician. Separate them, or distribute them partially, and the person degenerates into the large class of mediocrity men.

TASTE, makes its appearance sooner in the mind than JUDGMENT.

The person who possesses *only* taste in music, will play, but never can compose.

The person who possesses *only* judgment in music, will compose, but never can compose with brilliancy.

INVENTION and ORIGINALITY are eminently and essentially necessary in the mind of the poet, as well as taste and judgment.

* It is hard to give exact definitions on such diffuse subjects in *one* line. If the reader understands my *meaning*, I am satisfied.

To be a great poet, therefore, is harder than to be a great painter, actor, musician ; for

There is something of *mechanical* adjunct in the three last ; there is no such help to the poet.

DOCTOR JOHNSON is an instance of a man possessing the most solid judgment, with no taste.

THOMAS MOORE is an instance of a man possessing the most sparkling taste, with no solid judgment.

In music—MOZART is an instance of taste and judgment combined.

In painting—RAFFAELLE is an instance of taste and judgment combined.

In poetry—SHAKESPEARE is an eminent instance of taste and judgment combined.

In acting—GARRICK is an instance of taste and judgment combined.

Education may improve and expand taste and judgment ; but

If NATURE does not *give* the qualities, *they never can be acquired*.

TASTE is more nearly allied to wit than JUDGMENT.

You seldom see men of solid judgment, wits.

TASTE is the sole arbitress in dress—in decorating a room—laying out of pleasure grounds—ornamenting the interior of a theatre, both scenery

and house—making improvements either in the city or the field—arranging prints, collections, books—dictating thoughts for the lighter pieces of prose and poetry, and giving from the *mind* to the *manners* of the gentleman (as it were by reflection) a finished and winning demeanour.

An architect without TASTE, is without eyes.

A sculptor without TASTE, is truly without his hands.

In playing from a book, TASTE is more necessary than JUDGMENT.

The person who plays a “solo” *exactly* as it is marked in the book, is no player.

If you want to discover whether a musician possesses *true* taste and judgment, tell him to play an *extempore accompaniment* to a piece which he has not heard before. There is nothing *tries* his talent like this.*

In varying a musical theme, TASTE is more necessary than JUDGMENT.

In composing an overture *both* taste and judgment are a *sine qua non*.

It is extremely easy to introduce graces in an Italian air, and extremely hard to introduce them

* I never met but one person who could do this correctly and scientifically.

in an Irish. In the former, taste should be the guide ; in the latter, judgment.

The person who sings without taste, sings without a voice.

Originality in composing a piece of music, is as necessary as in composing a piece of poetry.

The *Design* of a painting, is what shows talent —*not* the colouring of it. For this reason, Epic composition is harder than landscape or portrait painting.

Episodial composition in poetry and painting is difficult. Music (a connected piece of music) does *not* admit of it, though I have heard it falsely asserted that it does. Wherever introduced, it is forced and unnatural. It must here be remembered, that the *allegro* movement of an overture is not episodical.

Though the press teems with reviews and periodical publications, yet are there but few writers who possess taste and judgment enough to constitute them censors either in music, poetry, or painting.

The overture is the Epic of music.

A person may compose a song, and not be at all able to compose an overture ; but he who can compose an overture *well*, can compose any style of music. But,

Many persons write overtures, who *cannot* write overtures.

Universality of talent is the rarest gift of nature.

Taste and judgment are *gifts*, not *acquirements*.

There is not (strictly speaking,) any pathetic or comic character in English music; nor (strictly speaking,) is there any *national* character in it.

There is a national character in the Irish music, which further possesses one amazing peculiarity, viz. that the deepest woe and the wildest mirth are discoverable in its strains.

TASTE has more to do with the *general* compositions of Italy and France, than JUDGMENT.

Sweetness and science are two extremes in music—both are not often combined in an eminent degree in one person.

There is no music which *reaches the heart*, like the Irish; other music catches the ear and fancy; sports round the imagination, and pleases it for a moment; but the *pathetic* of the Irish music “melts to the heart.”

A *medley* overture is not an example of genius.

Original graces and original turns, are extremely hard to introduce, either in composing or playing; but—

It is possible to introduce a common grace or turn (with great skill) in an original manner.

No person should be considered a *legitimate* judge of music, who is not a composer.

In painting, this last rule should not be considered *strictly* arbitrary.

In poetry, no person should be considered a *legitimate* judge, who cannot write *either* prose or poetry.

Would-be critics are very common—*true* critics very scarce.

Gracefulness is the *motion* of taste. This

(Gracefulness) is essentially necessary in dancing—in entering a room—in riding—walking—in sitting on a sofa—addressing a superior—making a bow—placing the body in a proper attitude, either in the pulpit, on the stage, or in the forum—and in any action of a finished gentleman.

Dancing, is the music of motion.*

* I have heard somebody remark, that “Dancing is the *poetry* of motion !” Now this remark of the afore-said somebody is infinitely too refined and *metaphysical* for me. I can conceive music in motion ; but I *never* could conceive *poetry* in motion. The legs that could form poetry, must have been cleverer than even Mademoiselle Mercandotti’s, which said legs *shot* the heart of the hospitable BALL-lover, while other people use their *eyes* for this kind of storming. Perhaps Madame Vestris, Miss Foote, Miss Tree, the Opera dancers, *cum multis aliis*, could kindly inform the

Painting, is poetry embodied in colours.

Statuary, is life unanimated.

Music, is eloquent poetry in sounds. And

There is no art which *speaks* like music.

Acting and oratory are the language of the hands, lips, and eyes.

Poetry, is music, painting, and sculpture combined.

Prose, is the *repose* (I use the word as a painter,) of poetry.

Amatory poetry is the metrical music of love.

Singing, is speech in sound.

author whether they ever felt *poetry* in their pretty feet. I have seen all the above performers dance in different shapes, modes, and attitudes; but *dash my buttons*, (as gay old Fawcett jocosely hath it in Copp,) if I ever could perceive (sharp as my eye is) the divine and ecstatic art denominated *poetry*, in their feet. Perhaps the word *feet*, in the metre of poetry, suggested the idea to the *somebody*. I must here, however, remark, that an objection might be raised against me. I stop it by saying, that I have given a different and more suitable definition; and conclude by quoting the beautiful expression of an Irish peasant to a friend of the author's who danced most gracefully—

“She shook the very music from her foot.”

In all the above, I find TASTE and JUDGMENT to be pre-eminently necessary.

Thus, my Lord, I have given you a large number of critical definitions. As a few minutes has written the entire, I am not prepared to enter into a minute or circumstantial enquiry as to the appropriate merits of each. It is relevant to you, to point out to me the defects of any, or all of them, and to furnish me with better or more suitable ones, when you next address me. I consider that taste and judgment must be united—and not only united, but united, in an *eminent degree*, to form a great poet, painter, actor, and musician. There are other grades of life—such as the statesman, the warrior, the accomptant, &c. where their junction and effect, are not so completely necessary. But in the other four, I consider them *sine qua non's*. It is the *want*, or the *separation* of them, which gives us such lamentable instances of false talent; and which at present inundates the world with the swarms of productions of books, paintings, compositions, and the vile rantings of the mock actor. Both the qualities I speak of, *must act in conjunction*. They cannot be separated without detriment: for their action is *reciprocal*; and though

a large share of judgment, and a large share of taste is desirable; yet if they are not *equally balanced*, and *largely distributed*, the possessor never can attain to an eminence in those arts which I have above enumerated. And yet, my Lord, I must here also remark that, perhaps 'tis well they are *not* common. Were genius common, it would *not* be prized. Were beauty common, it would *not* be valued.

If every one was a hero, a statesman, an actor, a poet, the world would not care about them. Genius *must* be rare, to *make* it genius. It must be left *solely* to that pre-eminent but wayward goddess NATURE, to distribute her precious gifts as she chooses. She will not be constrained. Her dowers *cannot* be bought. With the wayward fantasy of a beautiful woman she is wafted along this world (her dominion) on the buoyant and magic wings of Fancy; and just as the happy freak enters into her impartial head, she selects—owns—adopts. Her favourites (and *how few* are they!) are never neglected by her. *They* are ever and always her supreme and sovereign delight. When she *does* get into this happy mood, she *never* does her work by halves. When she *does* wish to make a poet, (witness the bard of Avon,) how complete is her work. When she *does* wish

to make a statesman, (witness Chatham,) how perfect is the moulding. When she *does* wish to make an actor, (witness Garrick) how gifted was her son. When she *does* wish to make a musician, (witness Mozart,) how divine is the composition. But then it is about once in a hundred (perhaps a thousand) years, that the wanton goddess *is* in these freaks. With ruthless negligence she hurries from the prince to the peasant, from the peasant to the king, from the king to the mine digger, from the mine digger back to nobility again; and just as she happens to be "i'th' vein," (totally regardless of titles, birth, and wealth) she calls her favourite, leads him by the hand, and at length crowns him with her green and unfading laurels.

I shall now glance at oratory—both that of the forum and the stage.

In speaking of rhetorical expression,* I shall commence with a line, than which I know nothing more correct, just, or true, from the Rosciad of the celebrated Churchill.

It is the MANNER which gives strength to all.

In conjunction with this, I shall also quote a line from one whom I look on to be no bad judge in such matters—Chesterfield. "The *manner* is as important as the *matter*."

Hand the finest sermon by a Tillotson or a

Kirwan to a bad preacher—give the best piece of oratory by a Canning or a Chatham, to a would-be speaker; and I would as soon hear a ballad singer enact. Where then lies the secret charm? Where the undefinable, winning, and powerful spell, which the orator or the actor uses when he speaks? I answer it is in the *manner*. For a proof of this, I ask the reader to pass any day into the law courts, or to the House of Commons, and he will there often hear the soundest sense, the best arguments, the most elaborate propositions laid down by persons who have not the *manner*, and who will not win on his mind or captivate his ear, (and many such names could I reckon up.) I shall now ask of him to pass into the same places, and tell him to listen to those sound arguments—to those elaborate compositions, spoken by the splendid and brilliant orator; and I shall *then* ask him, if his mind is unconvinced—*then* ask him if his ear is uncaptivated. I wait not for his answer. I fearlessly answer for him, and say no.

“ It is the *manner* which gives strength to all.”

Yet again. Tell Kean to speak his opening speech in his inimitable and powerful Richard—listen and be delighted. Tell some wretched actor

to repeat the same—sicken and be disgusted Where lies the difference, the charm which captivates in the one and disgusts in the other? In the *manner*. Manner is to the actor and the orator, what *touch* is to the piano or the harp. String the harp ever so beautifully—tune the piano ever so correctly, and run the finger badly over it, and the melody pleases not—the airs are discord. Hand now the harp to the bold musician, and mark the melody that rings from it. The ear tires not. It listens long and delighted to it. (And here, my Lord, if I wished to pay a compliment, I could easily find a fair and graceful form not very far from your house, with whose playing my very ear has been chained, and whose sweet turns and touches are yet recollected by that ear.) To such a harper the ear can listen in rapt attention. To such an orator, the same ear can turn, “and think down hours to moments.” The harper plays—the orator speaks. In *either* case, ’tis music. When Cicero was making those noble appeals to the senate of Rome to save his country, and was standing unabashed and undaunted before the terrific and lawless Catiline—when Chatham stood forth before the assembly of the first empire in the world, and delivered his sublime orations for the prosperity of the country which

was nearest to his heart ; who is it that did not feel “ the mind—the music ” (as Lord Byron beautifully says) breathing and burning from their eloquent lips ?

If the harp has music in it, so has the voice. When combined with *manner*, it has a thousand-fold power in it, and sways beyond any harp. The voice is a harp. Take the voice and the manner away, and the actor and orator are actually a cypher. A speech badly delivered, is like a piece of music badly played. It is impossible the ear can feel pleased with either ; and if the ear is captivated, be assured that the mind will follow. If the actor or the orator wishes to persuade, it is not by *what* he has to say, but by the *manner* in which it is said, that he can accomplish his object. Mere speaking will not do. Mere motion of the hands and feet—measured looks—studied starts—dropping the voice at the tag end of a period—all these have nothing to do with rhetorical expression. They disgust. Rhetorical expression is a just and beautiful combination of the *language* of the eyes, lips, countenance, arms, and body. *Nature* must here be the guide. They all must move in concert. All must act together. Each must be dependant on the other, and be under such perfect and complete controul of the

possessor, that he can summon at his will, that which he chooses to call into action. Gracefulness and brilliancy are two very essential requisites in an orator. There are two capital examples in the present day for both of these. I know nothing better than the manner of Mr. Peel for the first; and for the last, Canning is a special example. The first is a most desirable and winning quality. Without it, speech is almost nothing; and it is just as requisite in the senate as on the stage. I do not see much of it in either of these places. The great study of the present day drives it from the stage; and the want of talent, makes it rare in parliament. There is a graceful suavity in the manner of Mr. Peel, which I think is greatly becoming; and it is seen to advantage in him, as he has not been *taught*. Cicero tells us that an orator should not be "*vastus*."—His figure must be graceful. This shows what a keen sense he had of what was requisite in a speaker. A celebrated critic also tells us,

The actor's province, they but vainly try
Who want these things—deportment, voice, and eye.

In this I readily agree. It is impossible that a man can possess rhetorical expression if he is not gifted with all these. A quick and keen eye (and

I never saw real talent with a dull one) is necessary to give expression to the face. "Voice" is *indispensably* necessary to give effect to the words, and make them reach the heart. And "deportment" is essential to give a finish to the entire, and throw a winning charm over the gait, the step, and air.

In speaking (as well as in singing) care should be taken to open the mouth, and give free vent to the words, taking care to mark the emphatic words, and vary the voice as the sense and as the author intend. It is excessively hard to know *well* how to manage the arms; and even in the graceful art of dancing, it is not every one who knows how to carry the body properly from the hips upward. A single raising of the arm will often speak more than the most studied swaggering of them; and one of the hardest things in the actor or orator is to beget what Hamlet calls "a temperance and a smoothness." It is just as difficult in comedy as tragedy, and unless nature directs, art never can attain it. The position of the body standing should also be attended to, and in the forum or on the stage it should not be neglected. In waiting to take up a part (while the other is speaking) the actor should not stand as if he were a statue, or as if he were waiting for some sign (and I really fear it is often the case) from

his interlocutor to begin. The deception should be kept up as much as possible, and the dialogue should appear easy, flowing, and natural, and *not* as if it were got off to repeat like a parrot. The dress should also correspond with the character, and be consonant to it. I have seen actors and actresses so load and besmear themselves with ornaments and tassels, that they looked more like mountebanks than ladies and gentlemen. Taste must here be the guide; and it is very possible (in comedy) for a dress to be splendid without being genteel—for a person to put on the *clothes* without the *manners* (the grand requisite) of the gentleman, and for a performer to mistake levity for humour, mimicry for nature, and studied negligence for grace and ease; which two last things are perhaps the very hardest for either actor or gentleman to acquire.

The dress of the bar I think an help to an orator. The senator wants it. In a painting, we always see the pencil employed to dress the figure gracefully and pleasingly; and West, when he painted his "Marc Anthony haranguing," and his "Christ rejected,"* knew well that his draperies

* These pictures are masterpieces. I never saw *grouping* in painting till I saw "Christ rejected;" nor

should be attended to, and he has accordingly done so.

The face is also another peculiar care of the actor; and the school of study informs him, that unless his eyebrows are besmeared so as to look like soot—his cheeks daubed until they appear like glowing beef-steaks—his wig curled with the nicety of a head in a barber's window—and his cheeks with plumpers in them to stick them out—he never can succeed in getting admiration from the critic's row in the pit, or an ogle from some Miss in the boxes. The actor who wants expression—the female who wants beauty always resorts to these aids; and in the morning both are the most frightful of animals. The school of study

did I ever see *sublimity* till I saw his transcendant picture of "Death on the pale Horse." It would be a hazardous thing to find fault with such a master, and perhaps it might be deemed hypercriticism to say that the last picture is too crowded. He, however, had so many things to express, that it must have been indeed hard to have included them all in one sheet of canvass. The figure protecting the dying female from the infuriated horse, is delightfully episodical. No amateur of painting should live in England without seeing these three pictures. Were I to include a fourth, I would mention his "Cupid complaining to Venus."

says—walk by rule, speak by rule, act by rule, and even paint by rule. To such egregious lengths even is it carried, that I heard an actor say, that, when a boy, he was informed by a stage manager, “that he might be able to hand a chair to a female (simple as it might appear) very well in a drawing-room, yet he never could do it on the stage!!” Now I go in direct contradiction to this, and say it is infinitely harder to hand it in a drawing-room than on the stage.

I before spoke of gracefulness. Without it the actor and orator are nothing. Mr. Peel is the best model in the senate, and I think Mr. Kemble is our most graceful actor. I much regret to find his voice failing him, and that age should appear so on him. When a young man he must have possessed the quality eminently, and “the graceful levity of youth” is no easy thing to catch on the stage. There are few things where *study* can be so easily perceived as any attempt to catch gracefulness. Handsome figure and innate gentility of manner are essential requisites for it, and without these it *never* can be attained. Sweetness and flexibility of voice is also another requisite in rhetorical expression. Its charm is powerful; and I remember being told by a member of the Irish Parliament, that they used fre-

quently to go and listen to the silver tones of one of the then leading speakers (whose name I now forget,) though neither his arguments or periods were particularly brilliant. This kind of voice I do not often find in the bar, senate, or stage. It is a rare gift. I take it to be one of the most powerful instruments in the hands of the judicious orator or actor. It is like a harp delightfully tuned, which, when well played on, wins on and captivates the ear; and, like that harp, can change (with infinitely more variety) its keys, and can be varied and modulated on with a power and a charm beyond any harp.

Speaking and reading in private will improve it, or rehearsing on the sea shore, where the noise partly drowns it, will strengthen its tone. Distinctness in its tones should be attended to, without at the same time laying stress on particular syllables or monosyllables. This is a barbarism: a nice ear will avoid it; and a wrong emphasis in a speech is as bad as a false note in music. In this respect I see a great similarity between speaking and music; and I cannot help saying, that unless a person has a nice ear for one, he cannot succeed in the other.

As a model for action, the great orator is better to copy from than the actor. And the reason is that

a leading orator will not study his speeches. Now, the actor does. In the orator, according as the words flow from him, so will the hands be raised and the face be lighted up, thus following the impulse and the passion of his subject. In the actor, the speech is made for him, and he has to adjust his hands and fix his attitudes to it previously. Of this, the less the better; and *if* the actor had talent enough to do so daring a thing, I could conceive scarcely any thing more delightful than to see him perform in a new play on a first night *without* having rehearsed. Every thing would then be dictated by his own genius, and we should find nature performing instead of art, its copyist. But Garrick is gone, and it is once in a hundred years that "we shall look on his like again."

Imitation, or copying any particular speaker, is also a thing which should be strenuously avoided. Genius never copies: "originality," says our leading poet, "is a distinguishing mark of talent." I once saw an actor in a provincial town copy even the voice (bad as it is) of Kean. In parliament I have also seen the leading men aped. Wherever this appears, genius is absent. Indeed, to be a distinguished and leading orator, and a distinguished and leading actor are hard, very hard

things. The former is more so than the latter. The speech is made in the latter—it is *to* be made in the former. The first has the senate of England to speak before and to please—the last a mixture of all sorts to gratify; and the groundlings will often applaud when the true critic will condemn. And here I would remark, that I fear actors frequently strain at what, in their language, is deemed *stage effect*, merely to catch the ears of these groundlings, and thus raise a clap. “This is vile.” If too, it is found by some lucky piece of stage trick, that a clap or a laugh is once raised it will be imitated by the next person who wants to purchase a plaudit at a cheap rate. Imitation in any respect is vile.*

- * “The actor who would build a solid fame,
Must imitation’s servile arts disclaim;
Act from himself—on his own bottom stand,
I hate e’en Garrick at this second hand.”

CHURCHILL.

I shall here introduce the following anecdote, which is perhaps not generally known.

Prior to the publication of his celebrated satire by the above capital author, it somehow got wind that he was engaged in satirizing the gentlemen of *small-ware talent*. The poor *would-be’s* were each and every of

Antithesis is a powerful figure in the hands of an orator. Climax and metaphor (the latter par-

them in sore affright, and as it flew like wild-fire among them, and as they well knew his keen powers in that line, the whole armament of them were alive and buzzing about; and they were every day watching him and prying after him to see when he would go into his bookseller's with the awful instrument of their death in his hand. Some of them used to look big and gigantic at him, others would shake portentous whips at him some hundred yards from him, some would grin "ghastly smiles" at him. Poor Churchill, amid all this "hurly burly," well knew that as long as a man threatens, so long will he never fight; and with an immensity of maliciousness he used to pretend to be deeply affected by them, and would ever and anon go into his bookseller's.

Now I certainly must own that this would be *very* appalling *indeed* (as John Bull saith) for a young author to go through, and yet I beg, with a world and a half of respect to inform the aforesaid gentlemen of *small-ware talent* of the present day, that I intend satirizing them, and that I shall publish it "after convenience." If it were possible for any of them to know me by sight, it would be the prettiest little farce in the world to see them go on as above. It really is amusing to see a *man* (I thought it only belonged to "womankind") go on with all this pretty little artillery and knickery-knackery. "After this public notice, all *would-be's* shall be

ticularly) are beautiful figures in such a man's hands. They essentially belong to rhetorical expression. In musical expression, even these can be somehow attended to, and I here again trace the similarity between rhetoric and music. *Prosopopæia* is also another powerful figure. "The author of *Waverley*" has immense tact in embodying persons and scenes, and sketching them off so as to appear like copper-plates instead of letter-press in his leaves. In this respect, he is beyond any writer of the present day. But wit is perfectly essential (and a *sine qua non*) in the hands of any one who aspires to be a brilliant orator. It is impossible to be this latter without it. It affords a readiness and a quickness in replying to

prosecuted" who do not hate me as per above. And yet satire is a rare gift; so rare, that I shall fail in it. But one man (since the death of the giant Byron) is gifted with it—the immortal author of the *Bæviad* and *Maviad*.

But if some man more daring than the rest,
Should dare attack these gnatlings in their nest;
At once they rise with impotence of rage,
Whet their small stings and buzz about the stage.
What! shall opinion then be chain'd?
No! though half-poets with half-players join.

CHURCHILL.

K

your antagonist; and often by a happy stroke or brilliant expression turns the argument on him. An orator must also have the power of *concentration*. He must put his adversary's arguments into the narrowest compass, and seize on his weak parts, and also be able to *instantly* catch the slightest opening which he makes. This is the most powerful mode of attack; and the man who turns his own arguments against his opponent, and fights him on his own ground, is ever the most able and talented speaker. Satire (I mean *true* satire) is also another pre-eminent auxiliary. The man who has it in perfection, can crush his enemy even to his feet; and we all have seen with what terrific force *Junius* once wielded it. I know nothing in the English language (in this style) beyond these letters, for classic elegance, force, terseness, and mighty satire. His letters stand alone and unrivalled, nor since their appearance (nor even before it) has there anything appeared which can equal them. Canning (of our present speakers) possesses this quality richer than his cotemporaries. Brougham has it also. This latter gentleman has the method which I above described, of seizing on his adversary's words, and turning them either by wit or satire (these are distinct, though they often go hand in hand) to his

own advantage ; and I once heard him in parliament turn the argument completely on his adversary, by catching some of his words and turning them into ludicrous wit. His manner wants the suavity of Peel. Peel's wants the energy of Brougham. Canning steers somewhat a middle course. In a word, if a speaker could catch the gracefulness of Peel—the nerve of Brougham—and the brilliancy of Canning, he would be a finished and a complete orator.

When I recollect this, my Lord, I almost think that the task which I would engage in is nearly hopeless. I here allude to the great study and technicality of the *acting* ; and the excessive formality, want of truth, and vapidness of the dramatic pieces of THE PRESENT DAY. Strange as it may appear (to those who form *schools* of acting,) yet I must distinctly assert, that *study* is the ruin of the actor. It, perhaps, will appear still stranger, when I assert, (and am prepared to maintain it,) that there has been but one *genuine* comedy (oh, tempora !) written since the production of that unrivalled piece of comic humour—wit—and character—"The School for Scandal." It is not my intention to enter now into the causes of this, as I intend to reserve it for a future

Essay; but it certainly is my intention to allude to studied acting.

As prefatory matter then to those remarks which your Lordship has requested from me; I must inform you (which I was not aware of until lately,) that there are *schools* of acting in London—regular masters who *drill* into their poor scholars “the art, secret, and mystery” of acting; exactly, I presume, as your Lordship’s relative orders his adjutant to put the men of the regiment through their facings!! Here, my Lord, is the secret—this the cause of NATURE being banished from the stage. The actor is not left to his own discretion, his own judgment; but his talent (if he has any,) is warped — twisted — screwed—and at length ruined, by their *regius professors* and histrionic mystery. After breakfast, he goes to be taught; after supper (for even at night, I am told, it is kept up) he goes to be taught; and then, when he comes home, to share perhaps, in the domestic comforts of his friends and family, he again runs over “the dull dry lesson,” for the next day’s rehearsal. My Lord, this is vile. I care not whether these *regius professors* get angry or not at my impugnement of their system; I do pronounce it, not only vile, but *ruinous* and *detri-*

mental. What, my Lord! *Teach* a man how to walk into a large room boarded like any other room, and hung round with scenery instead of paper hangings. *Teach* a man how to talk to his fellow brethren, and repeat words which are beforehand *made* for him. *Teach* a man how to address himself as a gentleman to those who are around him—to walk in, walk out, sit in a chair, raise his hands up and down, and make his legs move one before the other, and all this because he happens to be on a large area called a stage, and not in a private drawing-room! My Lord, it *may* require *teaching*, but I unhesitatingly say, that the *taught* actor is the *spoiled* actor. Who taught Garrick? Who instructed Chatham? (and it must here be observed, that I by no means wander from my subject when I class forensic and theatrical eloquence together.) Who taught Cicero? Who Demosthenes? Who the brilliant Canning, or the graceful Peel? Who taught Kemble how to do his Mirabel, Kean his Richard, or Miss O'Neil her Juliet? Who *taught* the celebrated Kilkenny amateurs how to perform their parts? You, my Lord, have seen this classical and elegant company of amateurs, and you can bear me out in saying that there was no character which they performed, that did not rival, *and oftentimes sur-*

pass the same characters performed in London or Dublin. 'Tis true, my Lord, that *all* those persons whom I have above-mentioned *had* an instructor. But, *who* was that instructor? *Nature*. "Enchanting nature!" as the poet most justly calls her. When nature *once* fixes on a favourite, he requires *no* help from art; and I fearlessly assert, that the man who cannot act unless he is taught, should *never* attempt the hazardous task of wielding the hearts of his audience. If he cannot do it by nature, *can* he do it by art? What is art? 'Tis a vile, second-hand thing that mimics nature. It wants the stamp and glowing colour of the original—its boldness, freedom, and freshness. It wants those master strokes—those inimitable touches—those transient, delicate, but electrical flashes, which fall on the heart with delightful and hurried ravishment, and like the tones of that harp which the divine Milton described,

Take

The prisoned soul, and lap it in Elysium!

This is the acting of nature. Ask me to *practically* describe it to you, and I cannot. It assumes a thousand different forms, but *all* true, *all* correct. Tell such an actor as I am now describing, to perform a character, and on the leading

points of it, he will make a hundred different variations, all of which shall be natural.* But—tell the poor taught creature to perform a character, and exactly as he performs it on the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five, so exactly will he perform it on the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six. Here lies the immeasurable distance between the true actor and the would-be. The would-be, has no idea of acting a character beyond one particular stated way. He studies for a week perhaps at a character, measures it by rule and compass, lays down a scale of inches, marks on what particular *board* he is to walk,†

* I have seen Miss O'Neil perform the scene with her nurse in her inimitable Juliet, in three *different* ways, all of which were correct and natural.

† The following anecdote, taken from Macklin's life, is far too good to be omitted here. Macklin was engaged to perform some of his leading characters in a certain town (I believe Dublin). Intending to perform the part of "Shylock," on the night to which I allude, and wishing to give some particular point to one of the principal passages of the play, he told one of the disciples of the *school of study* (guessing, I suppose, his stupidity) not to speak, *until he put his foot on a certain nail in a certain board*. Macklin spoke, but the said Macklin forgot to put his foot on the said nail,

fixes a glass before him, and calculates the *aphelion* and *perihelion* of the orbit of the hand to the heart, marks at what line he is to take off his glove, at what period he is to take out his pocket-handkerchief,* and how obtuse or acute the angle of his body shall be, when he is going to make a grand—a *remarkably grand exit entirely*, in the shape and fashion of—a super-superlative bow. My Lord, I call this, *acting by steam*. In truth, I know not what to call it. It is beyond my limited and circumscribed comprehension entirely. I can't understand studied acting; but I can vividly and delightedly understand *natural* acting. It is the very *soul* of a character. It is that which gives it life—animation—zest. Take it away, and you take away the *words* of it. Give

at the fitting and proper time. “Why don't you speak, and be cursed to you,” said the enraged tragedian. “Why don't you put your foot on the nail,” was the *happy and inimitable* reply. Stare, my Lord, or laugh, whichever you like.

* There is one actor whom I have seen perform, but I never saw him come out on the stage yet, that he did not take out his handkerchief at a *particular* part. I however must not omit to mention, that the last time I saw him, he took it out with his right hand instead of his left. May the heavens kindly bless him for it! it was an amazing relief to me.

it this magic charm, and you give it *every thing*. If I am asked what it is, I cannot define it. It plays in the quick glances of the eye, in the graceful action of the hands, in the rapid or retarded motion of the feet—directs the soft and suasive accents of the voice in Romeo, and collects and pours forth its thunder in Macbeth and Richard—sits on the features of the face in acute despair, when it would thus mould the countenance, and with its magic sway can even *speak*, though the tongue be silent! Even in music does this “spell and charm” act, and it sits on the eloquent lips of the enchantress *Stephens*,* when she is pouring her wild and native melodies on the ear—directs the mellow thunder of a Braham, when his voice rolls in volumes through the theatre, or wafts and varies it in a thousand tones in his graceful “*ad libitum*”—or guides the enlightened notes of Weber in his rapid and rapturous movements. Yes, nature! I know thee—feel thee—bow to thee—but my pen fails when it would try to catch thee and paint thee.

I have been speaking of the power of *nature* in acting, and I here am led to advance another proposition, which I am aware will to some appear

* This lady is an instance of *the natural* in singing.

strange. I say then, that it is infinitely harder to perform the part of a *finished gentleman* in any fashionable drawing-room, for one night, than it is to perform the leading character of a comedy. Why? In a comedy the words are *made* for you. In the drawing-room you have to make them *yourself*; and any deviation from which, either in grammar or elegance, will infallibly set you down as a would-be gentleman. Also, to carry on the character of a finished gentleman for the night, you must be a politician with the politician—a man of business with the merchant—be able to descant on music, poetry, and the fine arts, with those who are disciples of them—introduce light and pleasant talk to the females—fling your wit about with the brilliant barrister—talk of Hebrew and Latin to the scholar—and support a winning and gentlemanly address throughout the entire night. I therefore laugh when I am told that it is harder to personate fictitious than real life; and I am perfectly confident that my eye would instantly catch the would-be actor in a drawing-room, from the harshness and stiffness which for ever clings to him: the *rule and compass system* follows him wherever he goes; and I scarcely know any quality harder to attain than that of the *ease* of the gentleman: unless it sits *naturally* on

you, it *cannot* sit on you. You will here of course ask me what remedy I would propose, in place of the *study* system. * I instantly reply, if the actor cannot act without being taught, let him *never* attempt the stage; and, if he does not require all this proposed course of discipline and tutoring, let him be left to his own judgment. What says the first master that ever wrote on the subject?

“ Let your *own* discretion be *your* tutor.

I will take—I *can* take no authority beyond this. *If* then the man has not “discretion”—if he has not judgment, let him even turn his back gracefully on the stage, and not bore the town with his insanity. My Lord, I laugh at these words, but they have slipped out from my pen, and I really cannot go blot my paper, (I hate your blotters)

* New performers are regularly announced in the bills as “pupils” of such and such a one. *Pupils!!* are you laughing, my lord? Does not this appear as outre as if a new poet was announced in the title page of his book, as *pupil* to Mr. Campbell, or *pupil* to Mr. Moore? or as if a new member of Parliament was announced as *pupil* to Mr. Canning, or *pupil* to Mr. Peel? Alas! I would these four gentlemen *could* take pupils and save us from the would-be’s. Perhaps there never was an age so delightfully and obligingly prolific in gentlemen of *small ware talent*, as the present. God bless them all particularly! Amen!

and send my nice gilt-edged sheets of "Bath superfine" with nasty blotted lines to the drawing-room of your Lordship. But let me return to the inimitable advice from whence I have quoted the above line.

"Any thing *overdone* (and studied acting is always overdone) is from the purpose of playing. Any thing overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious *grieve*; the censure of which *one* must, in your allowance, overweigh a *whole theatre* of others. "Oh! there be players that I have seen play;" (and, my good Lord, there be players that you and I have seen play,) "and heard others praise, and that *highly*;" (let me recall the scene in Dublin, my Lord,) "not to speak it profanely, that neither having the *accent* of Christians, nor the gait of *Christian, Pagan*, nor *man*, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably!" Ah me! my Lord, this picture is not overcharged—not in the least too highly coloured. Never was ranting or studied acting so inimitably or so masterly defined. How nice must have been the ear—how exquisite the conception of what a finished actor should be, to Shakespeare, when he wrote the above lines. You will here at once ask

me, "if he *had* this keen sense of propriety and nature of acting, why was not *he* a great actor?" My Lord, would you *really* want to set the entire world laughing at dame nature for such a perfectly preposterous frolic. Would you want to have such an outrageous monopoly of talent in *one* man, as to be a great poet and a great actor. It is such a thing as the world never heard of. There is no man in his sober senses who would not have scouted at the wanton and freakish goddess for making such an outrage on nature. She was very near doing it with that *extra*-favourite of her's, Garrick; but you perceive, my Lord, she thought it would be most divine nonsense, and she accordingly thought better of it, and made him the great actor and the little poet. It is true, when she *does* take one of these freaks into her noddle there is no accounting for what she may do; and if once she falls in love with any young fellow in her giddy rambles through the world, (that is, if she falls *regularly* in love with him,) she will take him home with her, and totally forgetful of the modesty of her sex, will play with him in her lap, kiss him, fondle him, take him out with her to walk, show him and point out to him with a skill and a touch that none but she possesses, the beauties of her wide domain; lead him through

her foaming cataracts, her mazy woods, her spangled grottoes; and even placing him on the downy and brilliant wings of her fancy, waft him through her realms of space, show him her starry and studded skies, her wheeling spheres rolling to the music of the harp of night, point out to him her fearful storms and tempests, and *then* bid him paint, feel, describe!

But alas! my Lord, these freaks she but seldom, *very seldom* gets into. Stubborn and untractable, she must be left solely to herself; and so nice is she in her choice—so fastidious is she in her taste, that the veriest and proudest beauty that ever graced a drawing-room is not half so niggard of her smiles or her favours as the giddy nymph that I have been above describing. Shakespeare and Sheridan—Pope and Otway—Byron, Garrick, and Kemble are gone, and she now but frowns (instead of smiling) on the pigmies that crowd and usurp her domain. *

* I was in company, some time ago, with a member of Parliament, whose taste for the drama was both correct and judicious. The topic of conversation was the declining state of *genuine* comedy in the present day; and I made some remarks on one of the ephemeral dramas. "Do not blame it, Sir, said the critic, it is a capital one—*for the present day!*" I remained silent. The remark seemed unanswerable.

I am ready to perceive, my Lord, that you will ask me what is the cause of this declining state of the drama. This would lead me into a very large and wide discussion, and I therefore should prefer reserving it to a future opportunity. I, however, really cannot help saying, that I do not think it is for want of encouragement in the managers of either of the national theatres. Nothing can be more spirited or liberal than the manner in which the management of both houses is conducted; so that if "the gay and laughing Thalia" is dead, she has not been sent to her grave by neglect on the part of *those* people. On the contrary, my Lord, I am very positive they would shake hands with her most cordially, were she to show her smiling lips and funny eyes again; but since our mutual favourite, the immortal *Sheridan*, went, she followed him to his grave, and there in grief *yet* mourns over him, unmoved by one smile of mirth from her temple—unawoke by one scene of *genuine* humour from her dull and prosing sons! If it would so please your Lordship, I would extremely wish that your Lordship, when you next visit Parnassus, would contrive to present her with "one thousand and one" compliments, respects and good wishes from me. You may further inform her ("confession is good for the soul")

that I have been head over ears in love with her ever since I was a boy, and that, if I could once get near her, I would give her the most nefarious kissing that ever either mortal or *immortal* got. You smile, my Lord; but to carry on my metaphors, I plainly tell you that, were I to meet her in a drawing-room in "this diurnal sphere," I should sit by her the entire night; for her countenance has something in it which attracts and wins me, more than her sad (though interesting) sister, Melpomene. Let me paint her, for I see her plainly before me.

Her eyes are blue—dark, sparkling, brilliant blue. Her cheeks are covered with blushes which she has stolen from the morning beams of that "rude drunkard, the rosy sun." Her hair—her thick and auburn hair is floating around her in waving and wanton curls, and serves as a kind of covering to her Venus-shaped limbs, which are partly seen through the floating gauze which but ill conceals the lower part of her exquisitely turned and *bare* legs—for I am ashamed to say, my Lord, she never thinks of wearing a garter. She is dancing—her lips apart, and disclosing pearls which mock the glittering shells that spangle the caves of the Indian water nymphs. A wreath of roses is flung round her shoulder, and she is also

flinging them from her, round her path with one hand, while the other holds her risible mask. There are no pearls in her hair, nor are there any braided ornaments round her brow—her eyes are the sole diamonds that she wears; and the “quips and cranks and smiles” that are glancing from them, tell how infinitely mocked would be the rarest diamond by their side. Her bosom is full and prominent, “on whose top, the pinks that grow, are of those that April wears.” Her neck, high and commanding. Her shoulders firmly set, and most delicately sloped. Her arms white, round, and tapering—waist, slender and graceful—step, light and airy—limbs, uncovered and buoyant.—She is singing. Listen.

1.

Away! away! o'er the wild flowers fleeting,
I roam thus on 'mid my heaven of smiles,
And every woe that my bright eye is meeting,
I turn to *that* joy, which care best beguiles.
Fleet from me care—fleet away—fleet away!
Thou never may'st come 'mid my laughing retreat;
But come to me joy; sweet joy! with me stay,
And fling thy bright roses around my gay feet.

2.

Oh, here 'mid my bowers of laughter and roses,
I live amid joys which I never let die,

For if on my path, a sad cloud e'er discloses,

I turn it to beams, with the smile of my eye.

Away! then away! thus I buoyantly trip,

Nor sorrow, nor care comes wherever I flee;

With the smile in my eye—with the kiss on my lip,

Oh, who could cause grief to such a sweet one as me!

Now, my Lord, here is a whole string of poetry, and a whole string of prose, but "by the Ghost of Roller," as Schiller has it, I know not how it *slipped* out of my pen. Shall we call it a *lapsus ink-and-bottle-æ*!—as I do not *exactly* know what the genitive case of this *new* Latin word is; I must leave it to your Lordship to fix properly, and in the mean time request of you to pardon me should you bring in a verdict of "wilful trespass" against me. Your Lordship must however further perceive that I have been guilty of a most vile anomaly. For, I have said that Thalia was as it were dead, and weeping her bright eyes out, over the grave of Sheridan; and above, I have made her, dancing! My Lord, this is too bad. I however have painted her the way I should *wish* to see her, not in the doleful and sad plight that she is in; for I would much rather see "Beauty in smiles" than "Beauty in tears."

But to my subject. Before I proceed farther in my Letter, I can perceive your Lordship is asking

me, “ *How* is the natural style of acting which I have been speaking of, to be acquired?” My Lord, it *cannot* be acquired. If nature does not bestow it; all the study, all the lessons, all the veriest labour, will never throw round the actor this natural grace. The moment he attempts to catch it, the awkwardness with which it sits on him, is to a quick eye, *instantly* perceived; and though I say that it *cannot* be acquired, yet I fearlessly assert that should he enroll himself in the *school of study* (to be *taught* it) it will be infinitely worse. I therefore again say, let him give up any hope of being able to hold any sway over the hearts of an audience, if NATURE does not fit him for the task. Should these lines meet the eye of any young man who has an unfortunate predilection for the stage, I warn him (and his best friend would but do the same) to *never attempt setting foot on the stage unless his talent for it is of genuine stamp*. It will in the end be only his ruin. For, unless he can rise to eminence either in the comic or tragic line, what life is there more idle—what more useless? If he is obliged to go to school, the labour which he then uses, will just enable him to get off his part correctly, saw his hand in the air, use his feet in regular time, and—nothing more. Imagine such a per-

son coming into a genteel and fashionable drawing-room, with his studied bows and scrapes, his stiff demeanour, his automaton conversation—his shreds of Shakespeare and Sheridan, and *then* contrast him with the finished and easy address of the gentleman yonder, his graceful and unembarrassed deportment, suasive conversation, and classical language. Contrast them thus, and *then* see the infinite difference. This (a straining for the effect) is the rock which so many of our actors and actresses split on. They think that the moment they come in on the stage, they must do something *very* fine—*very* grand—*very* sublime; and they are on thorns until they get an opportunity of making some fine, ranting, *tatter-tearing* speech; they think also they must do this, just because they happen to *be* on a stage, and a parcel of well dressed people looking at them. You will here then say—"acting is easy." My Lord, it is *excessively hard*. The difficulty consists in possessing judgment, to know where to introduce the simple thing of raising the hand, advancing the foot, swelling or lowering the voice, and frowning or smiling with the eye. Here lies the extreme difficulty; and simple as it may *here* appear; it is about one in a hundred that know how to do it. Yet again. What should the stage

be (in comedy) *but*, a fashionable drawing-room? This I know is quite a startling query *to the present day*; but I unhesitatingly say, that to carry on the illusion *correctly*, the stage, and those who move on it, should appear to those who are looking on, *as if a suite of rooms were thrown open to them, and that they were admitted to hear the inmates converse*. If then we look on the stage in this light, (and I am content to enter into controversy with any person to support my theory,) if, I say, we look on the stage in *this* light; how delightful—how almost fascinating, appears the acting of the natural performer. But I shall here be told by the *Regius Professors* that there is no *effect* from this kind of acting. I am perfectly positive that to the eye of taste, there is infinitely more effect, than from the most studied, most laboured piece of performance. What was it made Garrick's acting so delightful? Because it was *all nature*. He *could* not be made to study—no more than the actor of study could be taught to personate nature.

I am here to remark that in the view which I have taken of the stage (likening it to a drawing-room), I distinctly expel from it any and every species of that vile and hideous thing called *melodrame*. It is a thing unknown among writers

of distinction, or actors of distinction. My remarks more particularly apply to *parts* of tragedy, and the *entire* of genteel comedy. The melodrama is a dramatic monster, fit only for fairs and public shows. It does not belong to *real life*. It has no connexion with the "world of reality," and if I had my wish, I would *for ever* banish it from that stage on which Garrick trod, and for which Shakespeare wrote.

These observations lead me to speak of a farce which has become extremely popular (from incidental circumstances) during the last season. I allude to the ever-memorable-and-never-to-be-forgotten farce of "A Roland for an Oliver." My Lord, this is a farce, (I beg the said farce's pardon, it is a comedy. Farces of two acts are *now* announced at all the theatres as comedies.) This, my Lord, is a *comedy* which is sustained by mad characters. The hero of it is mad, and the heroine of it is mad, and the servant is mad, and the servant's wife is *nearly* mad, and poor "Sir Mark Chase" (the only natural portrait in the play) most dolefully exclaims, that "he is afraid *he* shall get in the family way, and become mad too!" In short, my Lord, it is a regular INSANE AFTERPIECE!!

I am quite aware that I ought, "Lightly tread,

as this is hallowed ground," for the whole town has been running after this afterpiece. There are also the brilliant Mr. Jones, (an actor worth a whole dozen of *would-be's*,) and likewise the puissant Miss Foote, who perform in it; and I suppose they will forthwith apply to Sir Richard Birnie for a warrant to apprehend me should I criticize the play. But criticism must not necessarily glance from the *performance* to the *performers*. On the contrary, I am perfectly willing to suppose that *but for these performers** the piece would not

* It would be unfair were I not also to speak of Fawcett's Sir Mark Chase. If, my Lord, you have ever seen the brother of Mr. ——— of Summer Hill, (that hospitable sportsman—that terror of all the snipe, partridge, and woodcock for ten miles round,) you have seen Sir Mark Chase. I have seen no one who so strongly reminds me of this known character. He wears even the same dress, and like him, keeps open house to all who choose to enter. There is one thing performed by Fawcett in this character which is beyond any thing performed by either Mr. Jones or Miss Foote. (I humbly go down on my two bare knees, and ask pardon from mistress Maria Darlington for this want of gallantry.) I allude to the stamp, and accompanying "D—— me," which he gives when Highflyer runs away with his gun. This is done so excessively natural, so *impromptu*; that I do

have succeeded in the manner it has done. I have scarcely seen any piece which is so desti-

not think I see him on the stage, but in a field where the fugitive has taken his piece and scampered over a hedge with it, which is too high for Sir Mark to get over. He also does another thing in the first act, excessively droll. I allude to the *outrageous* kiss which he gives Miss Foote when he first sees her. My Lord, here is an old man of fifty or sixty, and were you to see him give this loving smack, you would think the poor girl's lips were bit off! The instant he sees her -Whoop! he flings up his hands and he cocks up his legs (in true sportsmanlike style), and he makes into her arms like a young scamp of five and twenty! If the milliner of the aforesaid Mistress Darlington will look at the *third* finger of her *left* hand glove, she will perceive it most dreadfully torn, picked, and otherwise despitely maltreated. When she tells "Selborne" that she will never either look at or speak to *Alfred Highflyer* (this is a sublime name, my Lord) any more, (for his defalcation in gallantry,) she catches hold of this unfortunate finger, and pulls, drags, and tears at it as if Highflyer himself was embodied in the said finger, and she was pecking at him. Now I do most humbly and dutifully submit that she might catch hold of and drag at the *thumb*, by way of variety. If it was not done with such scrupulous and conscientious regularity (*Ecce studium!*) every time she performs it, I should not notice it. I also have

tute of *situation*, (situation belongs to genuine comedy,) and which is so full of *stage trick*, (stage

another matter to notice, and it is my intention to by no means pass it over. There are two certain theatres in London, one of which is situated in Drury Lane, the other in Covent Garden; and at these two said theatres I have heard the *same* overtures and symphonies played two or three times over in the course of a fortnight! Now this is "a wretched way to dole out melody." When I go to a minor theatre I am prepared to see things on a minor scale; but when I go to a national theatre, I expect to see *every thing* on a proper and suitable scale. I do not blame the management for this, for they cannot well be aware of it, unless it were purposely mentioned to them; but it should be the business of the attendant of the orchestra to change the books at least twice a week, nor can I by any means suppose but that the music-room of two *such* theatres is well supplied with music. Now I know many who go to hear the music of the orchestra (and nothing can be more delightful when well performed) as much as to see the play. It may here be objected, that this kind of promiscuous playing might perhaps produce confusion, unless the pieces are previously practised. I instantly reply to this—let no one attempt to play in the orchestra of a national theatre unless he is perfect master of his instrument, and can play *at sight*. Shall I remark, *en passant*, that the *tone* (the reader will please distinguish between

trick belongs to farces and melodrames.) Almost every scene in it is forced; and for the purpose of *dragging* a smile from the lips of the audience, such an infinity of *knickery knackery* and stage

tone and execution) of the "first clarionet" at Covent Garden Theatre is one of the sweetest I ever heard. I however think that the bassoon playing might (in soft airs) be "*emended*." It was infinitely too loud in the latter bars of the accompaniment to "Home, sweet Home." The voice was drowned. I am always glad when I see manuscript music in an orchestra. It speaks well for the leader; nor should I have the slightest objection to hear graces and cadenzas more frequently from the leaders of the national theatres. The execution of a *Kiesewetter*, and the articulation of a *Mori* are difficult to catch, but almost every man of taste can introduce these extra turns and graces. I have heard *Barton* (the most graceful bowhand I ever saw) run on *a mile* before his band, and come back again with perfect *sangfroid*. You will perhaps here enquire, how my memory can be so retentive of all these minutiae? If you ask me to *philosophically* account for it, I own I cannot do it. I can only say that the smallest defect, or the smallest beauty, in either acting or music, is indelibly impressed on my memory. And yet, there are hours when I would fain have a shorter and more oblivious memory. Moments at times come blightinglly across me,

"The weight of which I would fling aside *for ever*!"

trick is had recourse to, that I only wonder at the prolific invention which could have got up such a "charming variety." I may as well class this with another drama of buffoonery and nonsense, designated under the title of "Animal Magnetism." I suppose the authors of those pieces will get *very* angry and highly wrathful, if I denounce them as ridiculous and absurd. The press is open to them to confute me if they wish, but I must very broadly declare that the characters and the scenes in them have never been paralleled in nature. There is no person of taste that would not be offended at the *buffoonery* of the one and the *insanity* of the other. There is however one redeeming character in this last afterpiece—Sir Mark Chase. I may meet a hundred such characters as this in the world; but were I to meet a *Highflyer* in any respectable drawing-room I should instantly get up into some corner of the room, lest he should do detriment to my body corporate. Maria Darlington also comes in with a great white thing flying and flapping about her ears, and crowned with flowers unwreathed through her auburn locks, (I suppose to set off her pretty eyes,) and she forthwith doth chaunt a song to her "dearly beloved," and sings, and waltzes, and whirls him about like a top—he (the said

Highflyer) having ordered the mad. servant (that he may talk lovingly and alone to his elect) to take off poor quiet Selborne out of the way, on his back, without the consent of the said Selborne "being first had and obtained." Well, my Lord, after she waltzes (and I almost forgive the piece for the sake of the grace with which she does it) she enpierceth the heart of the insane and inconstant Highflyer, with the whirling of her legs, and the sweetness of her song—the metre of which said song by the by is anapæstic, and the writer has thought proper to make it bad heroic in one of the lines. The song being ended, he thereupon doth most pathetically exclaim. "How divine she waltzes!" and in a trice they *swing** into each other's arms, and make up the *amantium iræ*, in "a long embrace," though Mistress Maria Darlington had told the whole host of critics and Gods, in the first act, that she "never would speak to him more!"—"Thus, my Lord, ends this eventful story;" and I have nothing further to add, except that this *insane afterpiece* was acted *every week* during the engagement of the

* I regret I cannot claim this word as original. I have taken it from a graceful monosyllable called "*swang*" in the "Hebrew Family"—a piece of brilliant wit and mellifluous music!

aforesaid deponent, Maria Darlington, and (will you believe it my lord, ?) the first comedy that ever was written, "The School for Scandal," was acted during that time—once! so much for the taste of the present day; nor do I believe Lord Byron was incorrect when he said that "the taste of the present day was false and declining." (I would his pen were still awake to lash away its follies and foibles!)

He would depict infinitely better than I could, that class of persons whom I have so repeatedly called *Would-be's* through my letter. You, my Lord, who live in the *upper regions* of fashion, politics, and literature, have never met a *would-be* poet or actor. Suffer me, then, to take the pencil and pallet and trick him out for you. First, for the would-be poet.

He is exactly forty-two years of age—for he has been all that time endeavouring to bring forth something in the literary world, and has never been able to get beyond a *neat* sonnet in a magazine—a *pretty* charade in a newspaper—or a love sick stanza in a Sunday paper. If your Lordship will open the door of his room, you will find him sitting at an old-fashioned mahogany table, one hand supporting his brow, the other with the pen in it, *not* writing, for he is at a dead stop, cogi-

tating some *divine* thought. It is midnight, and the candle is almost burned down, and is just expiring, giving out its last speech and dying words—which he is almost totally unconscious of, so wrapped up is he in the *divine cogitation*. The fire has been out two hours ago, and a small kitten (his child's plaything) is reclining on the flowered rug, which his wife has worked to ornament the fire-place. *She*—a pretty looking little body, (for poets, my lord, are amorous, and must fain have handsome wives,) *she* is in bed, and is calling out to the poor devil to come to her, from the inside bed-room; the door of which is left half open that she may have an eye on him, lest in his lucubrations he may set both himself and the house on fire. But alas! he heeds not—hears not her repeated calls, for—he is completely up in the clouds. His coat and waistcoat are open—his feet slip-shod, one foot out of the slipper—his chin has a three day's beard on it—his hands are unwashed—and the middle finger of his right hand is in complete mourning for its heavy duty, as it is covered all over with ink. His room is in a glorious upper story of the house, some sixty feet from the ground, and its furniture consists of a dining-table, a reading-table, with his desk on it, (which neither wife nor child *dare* touch,) half

a dozen of chairs, and one shelf of books, in the midst of which stands prominent and conspicuous a volume (and only one volume) of his own precious and dearly beloved poems “beautifully printed by Davison on royal octavo.”

Two visiting-cards are on the chimney-piece—one of them from a young gentleman fond of the theatre and its fair Cyprians, and who would fain be looking after his pretty wife—for the purpose of *philosophically* minding her; as *he* (the afore-said *would-be*) seemeth to be fonder of his inconstant muse, than of his own “lawful wedded wife.” His watch is lying on the table—stopped. That part of the table which surrounds his writing-desk, is furnished with two unfinished essays; one, “an attempt to find out the longitude,” the other “an essay on the precise time of finding out the resurrection.” He has his brow still leaning on his hand, and if you will look closely at his countenance, you will find that there is neither talent, animation, or expression in it. To complete the picture, the moon is struggling through a dark and rainy cloud, and is pouring her dim rays in through the window, one pane of which has been broken by an urchin, the youngest son of the shop-keeper who lives below, and who

flung an envious stone at him while he was "finding out the longitude." The picture is now completed, Will it do, think you, my lord, to send to "The exhibition?" And now for the *would-be* actor.

Come forth—come forth! thou thing of Shakespeare, ranting, study, and idleness. Come forth thou man whom everybody sees, and nobody admires. Thou who triest to please every body, and yet pleasest nobody. *There*, thou art walking up Bond Street, with the neatest stock, the neatest coat, the neatest summer waistcoat, and the brightest "Day and Martin" on thy shoes. Switch or whip in thy hand (thou *conshumate** rogue, though thou hast never crossed a horse) spur, perhaps, on thy heel, though thou never hast used it—glove dangling in thy hand—a *neat* coloured kid glove *en dishabille*—thy hat balanced exquisitely on three hairs, and a smicky smacky, lack-a-daysical "*how d'do*" on thy pretty lips (the Lord love it!) with a super-exquisite bow bestowed on the first Cyprian that thou meetest. Yes—*there*, thou art hastening down to the corner of the street to look for "gape-seed"

* Anglice, *consummate*.

both ways ; just let loose from either thy school of study, or let out from the drawing-room of a third-rate Cyprian.*

Not political enough for a club-room, and too full of mannerism for the saloon of fashion, thou paradedst in the streets, gaping—gaping—gaping at men, coaches, shops, prints of actors, mousetraps and other sweet-meats. Thy height is just five feet eight. This is the true regulation *would-be* height—"taken by permission of the manager from the prompt book"—and thou art leaning perchance on a dearly beloved brother *would-be*, or else walking *solus* and *sentimental* with thy switch or thy whip, twirling in all the neat and pretty convolutions of a fragrant and essenced amateur. The Lord love thee ! 'twere pity to let "the wind of heaven visit thy *nobility* too roughly."

Thou thinkest (so *exquisite* is thy taste) that "Pizzaro" is the finest play that ever was written ; and its ranting hero, is the very "god of thy ido-

* This description was taken from life, from a window of Trinity College, Dublin, some months ago. It is a *south-west view* of a *front elevation* in the *florid Gothic style*.

latry." Thou dolest out shreds of Shakespeare,* and will tell jokes of Joe Miller, "until the ear is pained." Music thou knowest nought of, or if thou dost hammer any of it into thy skull, it is—"a little on the flute."† Politics and religion thou despisest—the first being too deep, and the second "quite too much of a good thing" for thee. Ranting in never-fading glory on the stage is thy hobby; and to rant in ever-fading glory shall be thy lot to the end of the chapter. In short—"Thou art a great man in thy own little pewter-pot way."‡

But—to kill thee *completely dead entirely*; let some wag inform thee, "that an actor of eminence last night made his appearance, and was received with 'thunders of applause' by the entire house."

"He dies, dead! dead!! dead!!!"

Then—then, thou art all bustle, all confusion,

* I was one day in company with one of these bipeds, and I do not exaggerate when I say that to every period he tacked a shred of Shakespeare.

† The invariable and indivisible answer of young men when asked "What instrument they play on?"

‡ This capital expression is not my own. I believe it is to be traced to one of the Secretary of State's officers.

all spleen.* *Then* flies about the all-important question, “ Who is he—what is he—whence is he?—Does he do my part, says one—does he do my part, says another—does he do my part, says a third? I wish he was in Kamschatka, says A.—I wish the d——I had him, says B.—I wish he were in a horse-pond, says C.—I could eat him up with some salt, says D.—Let us give him a ducking, says E.—Let us put him in the papers, says F.—Let us get him into a broil and send him to New Holland, says G.—But let us see the *rara avis*, says H.—What kind of an eye has he—how high is his *nose*—has he a handsome figure—how does he stand with the big wigs—how with fashionable life—is he clever, if so we’re undone—is he a satirist, if *that* direful character, we’re blown to

* “ No people are so open to envy and jealousy as theatrical people. A man of cleverness is sure to become a professed enemy to the lower orders of them.” —*Vide Life of Garrick.*

I was informed by a gentlemen well conversant with London and its theatres, that when *Kean* first came out, so anxious were those who dreaded his rising popularity to get a glimpse of him, that the streets were crowded every day with secondary actors, to look at the “ wonderful man.” Envy and jealousy are certainly despicable passions.

the d——l—is he a man of wit—oh worse and worse! What *is* to be done?" Thus runs on the dialogue—thus runs the important dispute, until at length it is "Resolved unanimously," that a man of talent being a thing unknown among them, he is to be voted as an excessive bore, as it would afford a bad precedent to either encourage him, or allow him to mix in the company of their high mightinesses—said resolution being totally at variance with the feelings of a great and leading actor, who is ever glad to make himself the companion of the man of talent and cleverness.

I have now, my lord, drawn the picture—drawn it from life; but as there happens to be more—infinitely more than one of these creatures in this ungrateful world, which does not properly appreciate their abilities; I shall merely hang the picture up to the public through my bookseller, and shall with all the politeness in the world, request of any one who finds it to be a likeness, to purchase it; which, I make no doubt, will be perfectly gratifying to the said bookseller.

Your Lordship will no doubt now ask me to depict for you the would-be musician, and the would-be painter, as *companions* to the other two, thus making a neat *quartett*. Another time, my lord, another time. It is bad to crowd an exhibi-

tion too much. Your Lordship, however, engaged the drawings from me long ago, and, permit me to assure you, that I shall keep my word; not forgetting my friends the *thunderers in banco*; requesting of the aforesaid "knot of gentlemen" to get exceedingly wrathful and magnificently inflated against me, and to either *look* most direful things at me, or to *write* "a neat duodecimo" of satire against myself, my pen, and my books; it being a happy pastime unto me (forgive my ungodliness, my lord) to reverse the text, and to "provoke these Ishmaelites unto wrath, and to secretly laugh at their inward disquietude and vexation of spirit."

I think I hear your Lordship saying, "you are going the surest way to make enemies to yourself." Those, my lord, whose esteem I would value—those whose friendship I would unceasingly covet—the favourable opinion of *one* of whom, would weigh more with me, than the applause of hundreds of others—*those* persons, my lord, (and I feel pleasure in mentioning your lordship amongst the number) will never, *have* never turned against me; and, believe me, my lord, that I am reckless and stubborn enough to forgive and laugh at the worst clamour that could be raised against me, were it *got up* by those who have

merely talent enough to keep them struggling for life in the ignoble class of "mediocrity." But let me turn to something more agreeable. Let me reverse the picture. If we have *would-be's*, we have also men of talent, and there is no one who has seen the splendid and magnificent acting of KEAN in "Richard the Third," that does not bow to the superior judgment and spirited conception with which he has embodied this most daring portrait of Shakespeare. I know nothing in acting beyond his personation of this character; and I never can believe that any actor from the time of Garrick, has ever exceeded him in his eloquent and masterly delineation of it. I shall go farther than this; I fearlessly say, that KEAN never *will* be exceeded either in the conception or the acting of the "crook-backed tyrant." I must not omit to draw a distinction here between the *conception* and the *acting* of a character. A person may *conceive* a character very well, and yet not be able to execute it, (witness the critics in the pit,) but the opposite of this does not follow; for, if a person *acts* a character correctly, he must *conceive* it correctly. The *conception*, therefore, and the *acting* of a character are different, and in both of these KEAN has eminently succeeded. There is yet another reason, too, why he performs "Richard"

so inimitably well. He *looks* the character. It is impossible for an actor to *completely* perform any character, unless he *acts, looks, and dresses* it. Kean does all these. He is completely cut out for the performance of *this* character. Look at the man and say if you were *seeking* for a "Richard," where could be found so inimitable and perfect a representation. Mark his dark and fiery eye that at times flashes very lightning—his rapid and violent bursts of passion—his bold and haughty countenance—his hurried step—his stern and lowering brow—his very voice even is Richard's; and it totally wants the soft and suasive tones which could suit "the dalliance of gentle lover." I know nothing finer than the speech which he delivers on his first entrance, his "good night," and the entire of the last act. It has been said that the way the late Mr. Kemble came in first on the stage was the proper conception of this part—slow and measured. There cannot be a doubt, but that hurry mixed with restrained rejoicing should be the accompaniments of this part, joined, in the latter part of the speech to cold and plotting calculation. This is Kean's conception. This is the true one. It is impossible that the late Mr. Kemble could have done this character so completely well as Kean. The reason of it is, he

could not *look* the character so well as the latter. I lay a great stress on the *looking* of a character. Imagine Mr. Kean's performing "*Coriolanus*," and then the importance of it will be seen. Or imagine the figure that would suit "*Romeo*" performing "*Falstaff*."* This would appear egregious. Until, therefore, I see an actor who can *look* and *act* "*Richard*," I cannot help thinking KEAN to be the best personifier of it. I take him, in a word, to be *the* Richard of Shakespeare. His "*Sir Giles Overreach*," is also another most vigorous performance; the last act of which is totally beyond the power of any actor of the present day. The third act of his "*Othello*" is also inimitably fine; but he does not so completely *look* this character as he does the other two. This actor possesses another most essential requisite to a performer—the power of performing extremes. Sir Giles Overreach and Abel Drugger, and Richard the Third and Silvester Daggerwood are opposites, and yet I believe there is no actor of the present day who could unite them. There is also another reason why I look on this actor as possess-

* It is no impugment of what I advance, to say that Mr. C. Kemble performs both *Romeo* and *Falstaff*. I affirm that he does not *look* the character, though he may *act* it.

ing *true* talent (that rare gem) and it is this—he burst on the town at once. He was not years creeping up the hill of fame, and the critic who saw him on the first night that he made his appearance to a most miserable house at Drury Lane, could at once (if he possessed any insight) have augured well of his future popularity. True talent is seldom long in arriving at perfection. Even in its first dawning “the soul that is within” can be seen; and I am not aware that I ever heard of an instance of true talent taking any great length of time to place itself among the foremost. In proof of this, I might adduce many instances, which I dare say the reader is as equally conversant with. I rather think, then, that I express the opinion of our best critics, when I pronounce him the first tragedian of the day. In giving him this distinction, however, I must remark that the approbation has to be qualified. I have seen him play a part where he failed most completely. I allude to Hamlet. Hamlet was not made for him, nor was he made for Hamlet. It was therefore bad ambition which tempted him to personate the part. If the reader will turn to page 29 he will there find those requisites enumerated which an actor must possess to completely perform this part. If an actor does not possess them *all*, I cannot help

again repeating that he cannot perform this difficult character.

YOUNG.—I could wish that all actors were ever like this performer. He is not only the popular actor on the stage, but is the *gentleman* (no common character) in private life. Were I to enter into the very strict rules of criticism, I should perhaps not be unwilling to observe, that the public have not a right to inquire into the *private* life of a public character. I must, however, on the other hand, observe, that amiability in private life adds a lustre and enhances the value of public—that the man is often coupled with the performer; and that, however great the talents of a public character may be, they are infinitely more set off if his private life sustains the character of the gentleman. Who is it does not feel greater pleasure in associating with such gentlemanly characters as Mr. Peel or Mr. Canning, than in mixing with those who have *only* talents, and possess not integrity? It will here be told me, that youth *must* have its faults. I am willing (who would not be so?) to make allowances for youth; but I never grant the same indulgence to *manhood*. I therefore look with pleasure at this performer whenever I see him; and in the outset of my remarks, I at once say, that I never heard *declama-*

tion (I mean declamation on the *stage* *) until I heard Mr. Young. It is true, I have seen this performer but once or twice; but then an actor once seen, his *style* is (in my mind) seen for ever. † Nothing but the amazing versatility of a GARRICK (unapproachable in these days) can make him alter or depart from that style, which the first scene of his first act will at once develope to a quick eye. When about to deliver a round and set speech, or any striking though transient touch of poetry, Mr. Young's *delivery* and *action* (both most distinct things) are both fine and expressive, and there is also a grace and an ease about him, which in *this* particular, I have seen with no other actor. I fear his voice is not quite so good as what a musical ear could wish. I am informed there is a natural defect in it, which, though it may not be perceptible in his tragic characters, (I observed it in his "Joseph Surface,") yet cannot but prevent that fine full and round tone of voice, which is an *essential requisite* for the stage. I know scarcely

* In Parliament, the best *debater* is Mr. Brougham—the best *declaimer*, Mr. Peel—the best *sophist*, Mr. Plunkett—and the most brilliant orator is Mr. Canning.

† I have seen him in the part of "Foster;" but it is a mere plaything in his hands.

any thing, either in private or public life, so prepossessing as a good voice. The voice and *manner* of speaking is the very surest criterion of the gentleman, and I never was deceived in this method of judging yet. If then it is important in private, how indispensable is it in public life. The finest action—the best choice of words in an orator, would disgust me, were I to hear an unmusical voice; and the most beautiful face that ever glittered in a drawing-room could never attract me, did I not perceive the gentlewoman (for it is discernible at once) in her voice and manner of speaking. The voice is the grand medium of *expression*. It goes beyond the eye or the hand, nor can the finest set of features in the world declare any thing, unless this indispensable adjunct is present. I express that finished tone of voice which I allude to, by saying, that it should be in *speaking* what Braham's voice is in *singing*—rich, round, mellow, and musical. It is impossible that characters, where tenderness and feeling are to be expressed, can be adequately performed unless *this* kind of voice is possessed by the person who would personate. He may act—perhaps act the character far above mediocrity; but I must repeat, that he cannot describe those tender and impassioned touches—cannot paint and indelibly fix on

the heart these eloquent, soft, and suasive turns and tones of NATURE, which a vivid poetical pen may write down for him. It is the most powerful engine I know of in the hands of a man of talent. By it the statesman addresses the senate and wins over the votes of those who were before even his enemies. With this suasive organ the courtier gains admittance to royalty and moulds the minds of the glittering throngs that surround him. It is this which, when poured from the lips of a graceful and finished orator, melts the heart, wins unseen, unknown, its insinuating way, and then either brings forth the tear on the trembling eye; or else calls forth the smile on the dimpling cheek. It is this with which the lover pleads to the ear of beauty, and tells his vows and his constancy, making them even more grateful and delightful to her, when thus sung in sweetness. *The voice then is the key which unlocks the heart* and lets out all its hidden and tender feelings. The heart *cannot* speak unless the voice has music and musical eloquence in all its tones. Most justly is it observed by Madame Roland, "that the charms of the voice possess a powerful influence over the senses; and that this charm does not merely belong to the mind, but results still more from that

delicacy of sentiment which varies the *expression and modulates the accent*."

I perfectly coincide in this remark; but I express my regret at not being able to discover this kind of voice in any actor of the present day.* I therefore found the want of it in Mr. Young, more particularly in a passage which I have not room here to extract; but I am not aware that the lisp in his voice was the slightest harm in his "Joseph Surface," while at the same time such a fault would ruin the acting of his open-hearted and generous brother, Charles. There was also an inimitable *shuffe* (if I may use the word) in his "Joseph," which he managed some way with his

* There are some tones in Miss F. Kelly's voice, which remind me of the kind of voice above alluded to. There was also one sentence pronounced by Miss Foote, (in a popular comedy,) which was given with eloquent sweetness, and I almost yet hear the music of it—"Will he not tell me where my heart lies buried?" The sweet voice which spoke this should not be destroyed by verging into (what it often does) a sharp key. There are also some magnificent tones on the lower notes of Mr. Irving's (the preacher's) voice. The most perfect voice is that which possesses such extensiveness of compass and modulation, as to unite in it *fineness* and *sweetness*. The present speaker's voice is also a fine and impressive one, and fills the senate house.

legs and arms, that gave infinite effect to the character. And yet in his interview with Lady Teazle, he appeared to me to want insinuation, both in voice and manner. But this is just as rare a thing on the stage as it is in private life. There is also another excellence in Mr. Young's acting. He never rants. I have never seen him "tear a passion to tatters." Ranting is not nature. Ranting belongs to the vile school of study, and is looked upon as a most important requisite by its disciples. And yet to know where to make passion *stop*, and where to make it *begin*, is a difficult thing, and *here* is an instance where judgment must be particularly called to aid. Often have I been obliged to stop my ears and shut my eyes, to avoid looking at or hearing "a periwig-pated fellow," bellowing and roaring, "to split the ears of the groundlings." And I have again heard parts pronounced perfectly tame which ought to be vigorous and impassioned. Rules cannot be drawn. Genius, and genius alone must direct the actor. That kind of versatility which can perform tragedy equally well with comedy—which can glide into extremes, and play them with ease and unembarrassment, and which has the power of completely wielding the passions of audience, in leading characters in *both* lines—

this kind of versatility (one of the actor's rarest gifts) is wanting in Mr. Young. *

C. KEMBLE.—The versatility, above alluded to, seems to be possessed more by this actor than any other leading performer I know of. There is yet another perfection which he has—a perfection the most fascinating that a comic actor can be gifted with. He possesses, and he ALONE on the English stage, that which *Junius* elegantly terms “the graceful levity of youth.” I have frequently seen levity, but I never saw *graceful* levity till I saw Mr. Kemble. This must be a *gift*. It never can be acquired. Here is the reason why it is so seldom met with. There are also a multiplicity of adjuncts belonging to it, and unless they are all combined, the quality is defective. I here again have to express my regret, respecting the want of that finished and musical voice, which I have already spoken of. But it is almost unrea-

* I am informed that the “Hamlet” of Mr. Young is a finished performance. I never saw the character but once, and then it was done so “lamely and unfashionably, (though by a leading actor,) that I vowed a vow” unto the goddess Melpomene never to go look at it again. I fear I shall prove perjurer, should Mr. Y. perform the character. To see Hamlet *well* performed would indeed be a treat.

sonable to expect so many perfections in one man. I know nothing in comedy more correct—more classical (and to *be* correct and classical is indeed difficult) than the “Young Mirabel” of Charles Kemble. Had he the voice I spoke of, (and, if not too fastidious, a little more gracefulness of figure,) he would be *the* Mirabel of the play. The *conception* and the *acting* of it are eminently correct. His “Charles Surface” is also another delightful performance. He possesses the qualities for those characters which I really thought had died with Garrick; nor is there another person on the English stage that could successfully perform either of them. It therefore seems to me extremely odd that he does not *completely* succeed in doing “Doricourt.” This, I do not know that I can readily account for. Doricourt was sketched by the pen of a woman. She was in love perhaps with a character that she never saw in *real life*; and in endeavouring to make it the *beau ideal*, she failed. Now Charles and Mirabel were drawn by the vigorous hands of those masters, Sheridan and Farquhar. They are characters you can often meet with in polished society, and there are many points in them which the less brilliant and less prominent character of Doricourt wants. Mirabel was drawn *by* the author *from* the author. We

The word *elegant* should be seldom applied to any thing that does not most justly deserve it. I heard a most acute observer once say that it should only be applied to *women*. For once, however, I depart from the rule he so strictly laid down, and, applying it to the other sex, say, that Mr. Kemble is the most elegant performer on the English stage. This line, therefore, designates his style, and 'tis needless to write more, with the exception of again expressing my regret respecting his voice, and the want of that magic charm which *youth* throws around its characters.

MACREADY. This is the only rival which that powerful performer Mr. Kean has to contend with. There is no other person can mate him in the hurried bursts of passion, and the vivid touches of energy, which mark so much the *materiel* of the acting of Kean. There are some tones of his voice which have infinitely more of insinuation in them than Kean's. His figure is also more graceful, but it is *because* he has this gracefulness of figure, (as well as a want of fire in the countenance,) that I think he does not do "Richard" so completely well as his rival. Passion—vivid touches of passion, embodied in the character of some war-like hero, constitute the *forte* of this actor. This is his style. The person who drew "Virginius"

and "Mirandola" for him knew the extent of his powers; and the former character would sit more easily on him than "Caius Gracchus." I have seen no one imitate him, nor do I suppose that *he* would imitate any one. In one respect, there is a similarity in the acting of him and Kean; but it is easy to perceive that he possesses talent enough to "mark out his path," and act boldly from his own genius. With respect to taste and judgment, he possesses more of the latter than of the former, and as he is a tragic actor, the requisite is more useful to him. I am positive he gave some hints to the author of "Mirandola," as to those passages where his acting could be made effective—could be made into his *own style*. In "Virginius" and "Caius Gracchus," the traces are *plainly* perceived. There are more striking touches of nature in the first, than in the two last tragedies; but there is no dramatic writer of the present day, possesses such *nerve* or such *tenderness* (two most distinct, but most essential qualities in the dramatist) as the professor of poetry for Oxford—Millman. A character drawn by such a master as that for Macready, would indeed be worth going to see.

As I *am* on the subject, I cannot help remarking, that the newspapers and magazines (I except the

reviews,) who blame authors for drawing characters for *particular* actors, evince a very great want of knowledge of the world. If they can *prove* to me that Sheridan had no actor in his eye when he wrote the first comedy of the age, I give up the point : or if they can prove to me, that a drama written even by Sir Walter Scott, which had no character in it that would suit *any* actor in the theatre, would yet be accepted ; I also shall grant this argument. *How* is it to be expected that an actor *can* do justice to a character unless there is something in it that suits his style ? It is unfair to throw harness (however gilded the trappings may be) on the steed, unless it fits him. Fit him, and he puts forth his strength. I therefore call it the summit of affectation and nonsense to say, that no dramatic writer should have any leading actor or actress in his eye, when he is writing. If he has not, it is *impossible* that justice can be done to his plays ; nor can I help thinking that it shows a want of talent in the author, not to be able to *adapt* himself to the *different* styles. In this respect, tragedy is more successful in the present day than comedy. Thalia is dead.

It is useless to write further on this actor. If he did not possess leading abilities, he could not be the rival of Kean ; and I believe his private

character is as correct as his public character is popular.

JONES. Away, dull tragedy ! Enter Richard Jones. Enter thou merriest of all merry crickets and *make* me laugh. There thou art, *slipping* in on the stage with thy *slim-slam—slide along—dash along entry*—thy neat figure—thy slim turned ankle—thy Opera-hat, twitched under thy arm—spy-glass to thy eye—bunch of roses in thy coat—and a “*How d’do, demme, Sir,*” twittering on thy funny lips. Make room, make room for him ye would-be’s, and let him hop, and frisk, and dance about, for there are springs in his ankles, elastic belts round his body, double refined grasshopper springs in his arms, and some half dozen quarto volumes of fun (edited by himself and with *glossarial* notes) on his tongue.

Yes ; make room all manner of *would-be’s*, male and female ; for all your humour is flung at an *extra* distance up in the back ground scenery, when this favourite of Thalia *glides* in and mingles with ye. Either the dull mope, or the lively beap—the pretty love-sick swain, or the mad and tear-away “*Highflyer*”—all are perfect and correct in thy hands. Thy style is *thy own*. Thou hast no match, or if thou hast, I will back thee for one thousand five hundred and fifty-five—kisses

from Thalia, that thou, "her loving son," dost win the stakes that may be set down for thee to *play*.

And now as thou hast *slipped* in on the stage, stand steady for a moment, and let me view and review thee? How am I to begin? I shall begin by ending; for thou art too good-humoured to criticize, and too popular to require praise. So, *bon-jour*, merry one.*

FARREN. *Farren the inimitable!* I scarcely know any comic actor on the stage, that gives such force and *truth* of colouring to his portraits as this performer.† I have seen him in a variety of characters, and I have *never* yet seen him make a blunder. *Here* is an instance of unstudied and correct acting. The man does all his characters, not as if he came to show himself off on a raised platform like a wild beast, and had been paid a handsome salary by his employer to start, and smirk, and laugh, and wriggle about. He acts as

* I am informed that we are indebted to this actor for the introduction of the only comedy that has appeared these some years. I am further informed he has introduced more than one performer of merit to Covent Garden. If Thalia is dead, *he* must be sorry.

† "This is to give public *nottis*," that there are *two* Mr. Farren's.

if he was *not* acting before an audience, but as if he was speaking to his friends, and amusing them with his humour and his wit; and this, (I care not what the *would-be's* say,) *this* is the TRUE style of comic acting. I know this is most startling doctrine in the present day, but I am "stiff-necked" enough to maintain it; and if any one avers to the contrary, I shall be happy to meet the argument—"always made and provided" that the said reply shall be worth answering. There are two peculiarities in Farren; first, though a young man, it is old, crabbed characters he does best!—second—with *all* his grimaces, he has *no* grimace. His countenance is moulded, not by grimace, but by humour and passion; and exactly as these are to be portrayed, so does his countenance indicate the within feelings. The moment an author resorts to stage trick* for *situation*—to puns for *wit*, or is obliged to ask the pencil of the painter to help the efforts of his poor pen, he at once evinces that the mind and the

* The after-pieces of the present day are actually *saturated* with this "villainous stuff." I wish both authors and actors would read and attend to the criticisms in "The Times." I never find *slip-slop* in "The Times." "John Bull" might also be read as a commentary to it.

talent are not within. The moment an actor resorts to grimace for *expression*, to study for *nature*, or to by-play for *acting*, he also evinces that the mind and the talent are not within. I have never seen this truly humorous performer resort to those subterfuges. If the persons who drew "Sir Peter Teazle" and "Lord Ogleby" were alive, (alas! they are gone,) how delighted would they be to employ a leisure hour in sketching a character for one who would do it so much justice. Quaint and pristine humour—a touch of *antique amateness*—with a gentlemanly bearing, and a most happy and original drollery, designate the style of this leading performer.

FAWCETT. Were I disposed to criticize this performer, I shall confess that there is a something in the countenance and manner of the gay old veteran which disarms me. I therefore refer the reader (to prevent tautology) to what I have already said of him. His "*Copp*" is a more natural piece of acting than that of any performer in the play with the exception of "Mary" by the all interesting Miss Tree.

LITON. The style of this performer is the most *original* of the present day. He has no imitators, for he *cannot* be imitated.*

* His "Mawworm" never was, and *never will* be exceeded.

COOPER. The "Bromley"* of Mr. Cooper is a very capital performance, and is an instance of correct and natural acting. Perhaps I could scarcely praise him more, for nothing but talent can personate *nature*—for—it is nature which gives talent. I heard two very valiant *would-be's* say that there was no acting in "Mr. Bromley." As it is best to take no notice of fools, I at once agreed with them. This gentleman possesses one of the finest voices on the stage. I however can perceive that it wants suavity—I mean that kind of soft and sweet tone which would be necessary to perform some of the leading passages in "Romeo.†" He has a handsome but not an ex-

* Vide "Simpson and Co."—the first farce of the day, and worth a score of "Animal Magnetisms"—"Rolands for Olivers"—"All Mistakes"—*et hoc genus omne*." The spouse too of Mr. Bromley is a most happy performance by Miss Chester. I doubt if I have ever seen a countenance that possesses such a gay mixture of loveliness and good humour as this lady's. In fact, *all* her features seem lips, and these lips in eternal smiles.

† I have never seen united in *one* man, *all* the requisites for Romeo. It is the *most* difficult of Shakespeare's sentimental characters to perform; and I almost despair of seeing it done.

pressive countenance. He is an extremely *even* performer, and never bores you to death by making overstrained flights at sublimity. The words *smooth genteel* designate his style.

I saw him perform "Doricourt," but I mention the character not for the purpose of criticizing him, but for the purpose of passing remarks on the comedy to which it belongs.

It has been mentioned then, my Lord, to me, (and by no less a critic than your friend Mr. ——) that the *plot* of this comedy is not natural. Now, my Lord, as "Letitia Hardy," the said contriver of the plot, happens to be a favourite with me, and I think the comedy a good one; I shall endeavour to reply to the remark of "my learned friend." He said then, "that no woman would make love to man in this opposite—*antipode* way; for if she wanted to get a husband, she would have put forth all her charms, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera."

My Lord, this man, (a redoubtable old bachelor be it known unto all female readers who shall peruse this work,) I say this man knew nothing of women. Opposition as well as curiosity are ingredients in the character of women; and though I do not say that *all* possess them; yet, at the same time, I must not admit that all do not.

This aforesaid favourite of mine (plaintiff) then wants to convince the defendant, Mr. Doricourt, that she is not in love with him, by assuming that air and manner which she knew his elegance hated; while at the same time she is actually dying for the young fellow. She however well knew that she could assume the woman of sense and elegance when she chose, and being well aware that the pleasure of the *ecclairsissement* would be doubled when he discovered the school girl trick she had played on him, she accordingly proceeds in her mawkish manœuvres, but takes care "to catch his attention" at the ball-room, by twirling her feet in sundry and divers convolutions, showing pouting lips and a lovely chin, and doing other little et ceteras, which all women know how to play off when they want to ensnare the biped man. She *does* catch his attention, but it is not the mere giddy wish of running her neck into the marriage knot that makes her pause at this moment, before she discovers herself. She tells him that "this is the most important point of her life," (and how true is *that* remark,) for that the simple pulling off her mask makes her eternally happy or eternally miserable. This proves her the woman of sense, and also proves that her plan succeeded, for he cries out "Rapture!"

(no easy word by the by to pronounce,) and rushes into her arms; thus at once evincing his joy, and appreciating the plot of the woman who had sense and art enough to win him by so happy a contrivance.

There is another reason why I think the plot natural. Women *must* have their little tricks and their little plots, and if they cannot play them off, (more particularly when they are in love,) they will actually get stupid and melancholy. Man has other things to do besides thinking of such frippery; but woman has scarcely any thing to engage her attention, besides a book, her needle, and all this little petty warfare which takes off many a weary hour in the *important* planning of it.* The following is a truth—that marriage is

* The following is such a neat, pretty little *womanish* anecdote, that I really must extract it for my neat, pretty little womanish readers. I give it exactly in the words (but not with half the humour) of the witty narrator.

Some time ago a Scotch lady was on a visit with her friends in Ireland, and it so happened that the heir apparent of a title was introduced to her while on her visit. His manners being completely of the higher order of Irish society—frank, open, and gentlemanly,

either the heaven or the grave of love. To woman it is every thing. It is her life—"her being, end,

she was somewhat taken by surprize by him, not having seen any thing exactly similar to the deponent in the mountains and rough "highways and byeways" of Scotland. She resolved therefore on carrying off his body corporate to Scotland, and surprizing her friends by presenting to them a perfect specimen of a polished Paddy. She was handsome and accomplished—had lots of piano playing, tricks, and cunning about her—could manage a horse and her tongue most adroitly, and withal looked very saint-like. When once a woman *determines* on doing a thing, *Doctor Faustus* himself would not stop her; so she accordingly commenced "a series of operations both offensive and defensive" (to speak *à la militaire*) on the heart of the Hibernian, which was to be taken "*vi et armis*." She was however aware that it was an Irishman whom she had to capture, and that though she might easily destroy the heart of an Englishman, pin it to her apron string, and then make him follow her as she listed, yet she well knew that *Paddy* would redoubtably and strenuously oppose any such treatment, and not allow himself to be dragged, hauled, and bandied about in any such uncourtly and unchristian manner. As well did she know, that the Englishman once conquered, is in a manner for ever conquered; but that if her Irishman was to be won, he must be conquered *every day*. "Treasons, stratagems, and

and aim." If she gives her heart to one whom she *thinks* will love her, but finds too late that he

spoils" therefore were had recourse to, to keep up in his mind every day, *something* of her who wished to make him her "conquered captive." She had sense enough to think that marriage was the most important part of a woman's life, and, with a love which forgot all trouble, and which only a woman would put *in execution*, began to throw her chains around the heart of the person whom she would *only* have; and to aid her in this murderous and mischievous design, her friends and her family—men servants and maid servants—brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts—saucepans, kettle-drums, masks, candlesticks—horses, mares, ponies, asses, and fools were all engaged on her side "to agitate the question." In short, the armament to Walcheren was nothing to the armament which this Scotch lassie (I must ask Sir Walter Scott, if they are all so cunning?) had fitted out for the utter destruction and abolition of the poor Irishman. A quarrel, (we have all heard of "*amantium iræ*," and when was there a brace of lovers *without* a spice of mock warfare?) A quarrel was however agreed on during the siege, and "operations" were accordingly commenced; but the lovely girl went to such infinite pains and trouble to prove that it *was* a quarrel, that our Paddy was convinced it was *not*. Infinitely too good humoured therefore to do any thing but smile at the knickery-knackery. (when was a woman in love

does not ; that heart is indeed crushed. I scarcely know terms foul enough for the wretch who mar-

without it ?) he pretended to be seriously aggrieved by the proceeding, at the same time secretly resolving (as there was no *real* quarrel in the case) to await the issue of the *petit comedy*, and that *then*, if her love for him was real, she could easily evince it, and that if it was not, he had studied her sex infinitely too well, and had been far too great a rover, (a *national* fault with poor Paddy, arising, I really believe, from excessive buoyancy of spirit, and *not* from badness of principle,) to heed the matter. She was frequently warned that it was ridiculous for her (on this account) to try and regularly catch his heart. She was also told that he was young and dissipated—that he was fond of spending money, entertaining his friends, kissing the pretty lips of women, and doing other nefarious and unchristian things. But 'twas all in vain : when a woman is *in earnest* in her love, she never will give up the person she fixes her affections on ; and she accordingly very particularly told them all that she *would* have him, and that no one else but her "*brilliant Paddy*" (she thus designated him) should ever lead her, either to church or to bed. (Well done, Scotch lassie.)

She proved it. Her beauty and her accomplishments imperceptibly wound round him, and they were at length married. She afterwards told her husband (from whom I have the above) that some of the hap-

ries, and then behaves cruel to one whom he has *sworn* to cherish and protect.

You will tell me, my Lord, I moralize. You will perceive it is only for a few lines, besides, if I joke on the matter, I should also wish to write serious; so, with the same versatility if you please, I shall come back again, and quote unto your Lordship "the first authority" in the land on such a subject, videlicet—*an old maid*.

I do remember me, my Lord, having been in company some fifty years ago with one of these

piest moments of her life were spent in laying plans, plots, and devices for him!!!

But jokes apart. I should blame myself were I not to own (though I satirize my own sex in the avowal) that the love of woman, when once it is fixed on any object, is infinitely more pure and constant than that of man. Even when the very last hope is gone, she still loves on; and frowns, threats, and coldness are unable to quench it. My life is not very long, but the observations which I have made on the sex, induce me to say, that if woman has her waywardness and her fantasies—her little arts and devices; yet she also has that which throws them all into shade, and makes up by its lovely lustre her other defects—love, unquenchable and changeless love. To this, I bear willing testimony; and some instances of it have been sketched by the author in a forthcoming Tale.

marriage despising animals, now dead and gone, (rest and bless her!) and she did assuredly and didactically declare unto me, the words and terms following, viz.—“ that the moment a woman went to any *trouble* to convince you that she was not in love with you, that you might be certain (unless arising from your own fault) that she entertained a favourable opinion of you.” If this “ declaration” set forth in the “ court of chancery” of old maids (rest and bless them!) be correct, I here bring up another instance where my favourite, Mistress “ Letitia” was correct; and though Mr. Doricourt, with all his sense and all his elegance, could not solve her problems, conundrums, and riddles, yet she, by a magic stroke, at once gave him real delight and the most touching rapture. As a commentary on this, take the following example from *real life*—said example proving the above doctrine of old maids (rest and bless them!) to be correct.

You recollect, my Lord, the gay and the graceful ———. You recollect his gentlemanly and winning address—his brilliant wit—amiable disposition—and most extraordinary endowments. You do not forget the night he first caught your eye at the ball room of ———. You saw him whirl through the mazes of the dance, fling him-

self at the piano, take up the flute and accompany that piano, throw himself among half the women of the room and *find* conversation for them, and in ten minutes after, enter the deserted anti room, and with the member for the county, draw up the heads of a bill for him, which it was his intention to present to parliament the ensuing session; and remarking to him the leading topics of its accompanying speech.

Your Lordship, however, does not forget the pale and Madonna countenance which was sitting on the Ottoman at the lower end of the room. *He* went up to her. Would she dance with him? "No; she would not dance with him." Would she take wine with him? "No; she would take no wine with him." Would she allow him to sit next her at supper? "No; she would not on any account sit near him." Might he attend her home? "No; other persons would do it." And yet after all this *antipode* way of showing "grace and favour," a week after brought *him* a present which he could not mistake; and in another week was confined to her bed with a snug and pretty physician attending her in an *amatory fever*—he totally unconscious of having been the cause. Now "set this in case," (as the bailiff in "The Good-natured Man" has it,) and it will afford an

additional proof that *opposites* are *one* way of falling into, and making love. Further inform your friend, my Lord, that for *every* reason, I think the plot a natural one; and declare unto him, that I am willing to defend my gay favourite against any stiff and uncourtly bachelor, who presumes to find fault with her; or against any other unchristian aggressor who would harm, ill-treat, or otherwise spitefully use her. She is a sensible and elegant woman,* and I cannot allow nasty, fusty bachelors (however full of college learning they may be,) to cut her up.

This concludes my remarks on actors and acting. I however am to mention to your Lordship, that there are more actors in London than those above enumerated; but as I have not either seen them, or having seen them but once, (Harley and Wallack for instance,) I should not deem myself prepared to enter into minute criticism on them. There is a young man here of the name of Yates, who possesses powers of imitation in a surprizing degree; and it would

* These are qualities which it grieves me much to say, are not often to be found in the world. Few things are more delightful than the company of the elegant and sensible female. Sense without elegance is as unwinning and forbidding, as elegance without sense.

afford both a curious and interesting inquiry to the critic, how, when he is able to imitate the leading actors so well, (in some selected passages) that he still does not take a range *of* those leading characters. This would take up more time to answer, than what it is my present intention to engage in, and shall, perhaps, leave it to some other opportunity.

The only local circumstances which your Lordship inquires about, are, if the music saloon* is yet finished in St. James's-street, and if "The Diorama," in Regent's Park, representing two paintings, shows them done on a flat surface or not; mentioning, that from the accounts you have

* This is the most elegant shop of the kind either in London or Dublin. Those who do not wish to lay out money, should never go to this shop; as the civility and kindness of its proprietor will certainly *make* them buy whether it is convenient and agreeable to their purses or not. If certain national theatres would take hints, I would say that it is a capital place for buying music for orchestras, so as to make a *large* collection for that public who support the said theatres.—Vide Note, p. 153. I here remark that I have never played on such fine toned grand pianos either in London or Dublin, as what I have met at Mr. Willis's. I believe they are manufactured *expressly* for his splendid establishment.

heard of them, you wish you could be informed as to a certainty.

With respect to the first, it is completely and elegantly furnished, and your family can have a piano remitted to them (and I suppose *tuned*, one of these days) by all-powerful *steam*. With respect to the "Diorama," I can assure your Lordship as a fact, that they are painted on a flat surface. I spoke to the young man, who was bold enough to walk out on the frame-work of the awning which is spread out in front of the seats, for the purpose of satisfactorily assuring his eyesight that they *were* painted on a flat surface. I own the "Ruins of Holyrood by moonlight," to be the most beautiful example of *deception* in *perspective* I ever looked at; and the execution of it, as well as the way in which the eye is deceived, does infinite credit to the inventor. There is a female figure in it which is episodical, but which is perfectly allowable; and it evinced great taste to introduce her here; but I at the same time think, that if the figure were a little more light and graceful, it would produce more effect. The head too of the kneeling monk in the foreground in the "Cathedral," is, I think too large—larger, I think, than Napoleon's or Lord Byron's; and we do not often look for such talented characters in monks.

It now remains for me, my Lord, to conclude, and to apologize for having written so very long a letter to you. It strikes me I shall have to send it to you on some half dozen of franks, and to request that the mail-coach will order new springs before it conveys it, as the *weight* of dulness in it will break them down.

I know your Lordship will enquire, why I have not sent you an account of the *female* performers of London; but, my Lord, I *do* most humbly pray of your lordship to recollect, that were I to go and roughly criticize these right worshipful creatures, they would forthwith, and with the utmost *sang froid* take off their garters, and strangle me *instantanter* without either judge or jury. All the most refined and classical criticism, that I could pour forth on them would be as nought to them, if I attempted to say one uncourtly word against their high mightinesses. Besides, my Lord, my gallantry would be at once called in question, and as the celebrated *Junius* says, "a pretty woman is the only tyrant which an Englishman is not authorized to resist," I must only "*beg to decline*," as the official refusals have it. Further, if your Lordship will look to the title page, you will perceive it is *actors* only I have engaged to speak of.

The only thing, therefore, which I shall request of my fair female friends (and, indeed, there are many of them which have delighted me) is, to humbly and dutifully request that they will not paint their cheeks so *very* highly. In some cases, the rouge appears to me to be laid on with a *trowel*! instead of a delicate finger or pencil, so outrageously high is the colouring; and at other times I have thought that they had opened an account with "the new London patent brick company," for to supply them good red bricks; for in truth, their "glowing cheeks," have often appeared to me as if rubbed over with a brick-bat, instead of rouge or carmine. I confess I do not admire this, for it instantly puts me into the middle of the saloon of Drury Lane Theatre, or the saloon at ———. Now, not only in dress but in deportment, would I wish to see actresses, ladies; and were I to meet such cheeks as those in any genteel drawing-room, (I have before hinted at a similarity between the drawing-room and the stage,) I would but get disgusted, and should only be obliged to politely hand her the tail of my coat to brush off the dust, colour, plaister, &c. &c. &c.

I had written so far, my Lord, when I was invited to ———. During my visit there, I had

an opportunity of reading a most valuable work, "Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Literature." It is written throughout with the most correct taste, and profound erudition. I am therefore extremely happy in finding that such a man should coincide with me in the leading features which this letter presents, and I shall accordingly write down a few extracts from his admirable work, which (coming from such authority) will fully bear me out in what I have advanced. By the way of preface, I shall also just add the following from the high authority of Lord Byron.

"Writing for the stage, *in its present state*, is certainly not an object of very exalted ambition."

"I may safely say that the dramatic art and the taste of the public are in England in a wretched decline."—*Schlegel*.

"*If an actor requires instruction, he never can possess talent for acting.* Directions respecting action are of the greatest detriment to dramatic eloquence.—*Idem*."

"Some players (even good ones) are always afraid of underdoing their parts ; and hence they are worst qualified for reserved action, for *eloquent silence*," (this is a just and a beautiful expression,) "when under an appearance of outward tranquillity,

the most hidden emotions of the mind are betrayed. In general, they rather endeavour to make the most of each separate passage, independently of the rest, than to go back to the invisible central point of the character, and to consider the whole of the expressions as so many emanations from that point."—*Idem*.

"The person who represents a character *should resemble as much as possible in size, age, and figure*, the ideas which we form of the imaginary being of the poet, and even assume every peculiarity by which that being is distinguished; so that every speech should be delivered in a *suitable* tone of voice, and accompanied by corresponding looks and motions. He must also appear in a costume suitable to the assumed rank, age, country."*—*Idem*.

* Notwithstanding the *appalling* account which Schlegel and Byron give of the present state of the English stage, the author of this work is at present engaged in a comedy, (though his favourite Thalia is dead,) which he intends submitting for the approval or rejection of the public. His ardent wish is to see comedy restored; and though the attempt is arduous, yet, (as the common saying has it,) there is nothing like a beginning. Besides, he has been promised the assistance of one, who is a favourite both with the writer and with Thalia.

I feel happy, my Lord, in being able to produce the above extracts. They are convincing and unanswerable, and until some other more clever person confutes him, I shall implicitly believe in *all* he advances.

Your Lordship further requests of me to write you a list of our composers, poets, dramatists, &c. &c. I *shall*, my Lord, write you a list; but I regret to say it will be a very short one. We have got one composer, two poets, one prose writer, and no dramatist (in genuine comedy or tragedy) of the present day.* The name of the composer is Carl Maria Von Weber; the names of the poets are H. H. Millman, and Thomas Moore, (how I regret that the splendid name of Byron is not alive to here add him;) and the name of the prose writer is Walter Scott.† As for tragedy and comedy—

“ Oh! what a falling off was there.”

* Why will the author of that interesting tragedy “*Virginus*,” put so much prose in his tragedies? Surely his pen is vigorous enough to give us all poetry.

† I believe there is no one who will not allow that Scott’s genius lies in prose, and not in poetry. I make this assertion, *generally* speaking; and yet I know nothing in the English language (of its kind) beyond the delightful pastoral of “*The Lady of the*

Now, my Lord, after this "*fair, open, and candid avowal*," (as the *Parliamentarians* have it,) I do pray you to put up a short (but effective) prayer for me, for I shall certainly be *murdered* by the Reviewers, *particularly* if any poets or *prose*rs happen to write for them. I must only patiently and very heedlessly bear their stripes, but I shall *never* own my fault. Your Lordship will, no doubt, ask me, what have I done with the puissant Rossini? * Be assured, my Lord, that if he was to write until Doomsday, he never will be able to equal that giant Weber. Weber possesses *the master-mind*. Rossini has it not, and never will have it. One is a master—the other a school-boy. Even his best song ("Di Palpiti") is not completely original. There are some pieces, by Kalkbrenner, infinitely beyond Rossini.

Lake."—With respect to *English* composers, I ought not to except *Bishop*. I am speaking, however, of composers (whether English or foreign) of *the present day*. In song composition, and in the lighter pieces of music, Bishop stands eminently high. Indeed, in this respect, Mr. B. has more than one competitor.

* An instance of impoliteness in this composer has been mentioned to me, (when he was over on a visit here,) which I can scarcely credit. I can easily forgive eccentricity, (for it belongs to genius,) but I can never forgive impoliteness in any person.

Am I to conclude *now*, my Lord? Your Lordship will, I doubt not, tell me that my letter is like the web of Penelope—never to have an ending.

I shall then but ask from you a dozen lines more. They shall be the following.

I would wish then to see spectacles, shows, melo-drames and such other monstrous exhibitions expelled for ever from the stage, and feeble as is my pen, I shall always labour for it. I should wish—ardently wish to see genuine comedy and genuine tragedy restored in the present declining state of the legitimate drama. I should wish, that our leading actors should be *always* not only gentlemen but scholars, not only scholars but gentlemen. The actresses would I wish to see ladies in every respect. Further would I be *unfashionable* enough to banish any and every species of immorality from the stage, and also restrain the boundaries of wit to the model of Sheridan, and not to that of Wycherly. In a word, I should wish to see the stage (what it ought to be, and what it *can* be) respected and respectable.

“ You talk impossibilities,” says your Lordship.

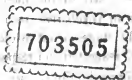
Be it so, my Lord. It only remains for me to express my regret—to greatly express my regret, that they *should* prove impossibilities; and though

my pen is but feeble, I shall ever aim for the accomplishment of the above objects, satisfied that I shall have the countenance of those who lead in the drama and belles lettres.

I have now only to add that, that I am sincerely and faithfully,

&c. &c. &c.

THE END

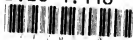


LONDON :

IBOTSON AND PALMER, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.



B.20-1.118



BNCF.



